From: TSARANDRO Austin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Asking RSVP to President Trump
Date: Fri, 03 Jul 2026 19:17:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello
Dear
I want to talk face to face with Dr Ben Carson or President Trump in white house but still waiting invitation from president Trump.
Help me to share this message to him.
Subject: minerals critics contract in Madagascar 🇲🇬
Former Mayor in CR Ampahimanga.
TSARANDRO Austin
[redacted]

From: Jonathan Zirkle <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Jonathan Zirkle, Pillar of Freedom
Date: Mon, 06 Jul 2026 21:00:12 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Dr. Carson, and Members of the Commission:

Please find attached the public comment of Pillar of Freedom on the Commission's draft report.

We write to urge that the nation maintain a complete separation of church and state, and to ask the Commission to withdraw or substantially modify the recommendations in its report that would erode it — chiefly government funding of religious activities and repeal of the Johnson Amendment. Our argument rests on two grounds. The first is prudential: entangling the churches with public money and partisan politics brings the corruption of the political process into the church, sets the churches against one another in competition for favor, and ultimately weakens both church and state. The second is historical: the separation of church and state was not a secular imposition but a principle built by people of faith to protect faith, traced from Roger Williams forward, vindicated by disestablishment, and credited by observers like Tocqueville as the reason American religion thrived. The draft report, we respectfully submit, misreads that history and underestimates that danger of entanglement.

I would welcome the opportunity to provide any further information the Commission may find useful, and I thank the Commission for its work and for the opportunity to comment.

Respectfully,

Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President, Pillar of Freedom

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

[redacted]

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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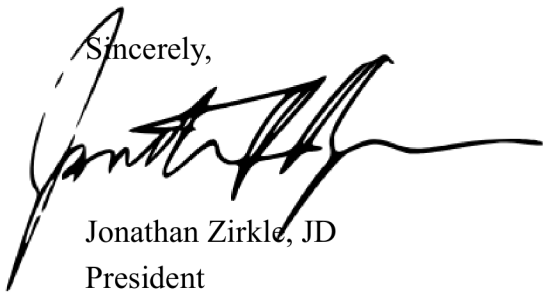
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

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DOJ-RLC Comment-019464

From: Marcus Sheffield <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] A Firm No to the Final Report of the RLC
Date: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 18:23:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

The letter by Seventh-day Adventist attorney Jay Cameron in response to the final report of the Religious Liberty Commission perfectly represents my own feelings.

His letter appears below:

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?

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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.

Sincerely,

Marcus Sheffield
BabylonUncovered Ministries
PII

From: Carlos King <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] SEPARATION of Church and State: yesterday, today, tomorrow, FOREVER!
Date: Tue, 07 Jul 2026 20:41:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Urgent Appeal: Defend Religious Liberty.

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 I an mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which I 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 a students of history, and a Christian, I am 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, I 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.

I 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. I 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.

I am 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.

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I remain, Yours truly,

- CARLOS KING

[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
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[11] John Adams, Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, 1765.
https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/PJA01dg2

#sda #adventist #adventista

From: Ronda Greathouse <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Wed, 08 Jul 2026 08:20:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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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.

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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.

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Ronda Greathouse
Proud and Grateful American Citizen

[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=37ac4da7-521ca827-37ab6942-74fe486959fc-1aae3958e260f014&q=1&e=5f7732ea-61b2-4316-94e6-7babd6c83bfe&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
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#sda #adventist #adventista

From: Venessa Sharp <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Wed, 08 Jul 2026 08:27:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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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.

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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,

Venessa Sharp
Proud and Grateful American Citizen

[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=bea7b64f-e13b94a3-bea092aa-000babff85fc-11d4fdd596aded64&q=1&e=c089f22a-9401-4f4d-a779-94e6ef1e47af&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
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[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=cb08d32d-9494f1c1-cb0ff7c8-000babff85fc-6a8103017c7d4f16&q=1&e=c089f22a-9401-4f4d-a779-94e6ef1e47af&u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.masshist.org%2Fpublications%2Fadams-papers%2Findex.php%2Fview%2FPJA01dg2

#sda #adventist #adventista

From: Heather Peterson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Wed, 08 Jul 2026 08:31:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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]

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We remain, Yours truly,

Heather Peterson
Proud and Grateful American Citizen

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[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
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[8] James Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments
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[11] John Adams, Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, 1765. https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/PJA01dg2

#sda #adventist #adventista

From: Phillip Ritchey <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty, a call to wisdom
Date: Wed, 08 Jul 2026 13:31:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a 46-year-old Registered Nurse, my life's work has been centered on the sacred duty of preserving human life and respecting individual dignity. I was born in Canada, a nation that deeply values human rights, and later crossed the border to attend Southern Adventist University. Over my career, I have cared for patients across the United States—from Florida, Ohio, and Tennessee, to California and Washington. My ties to America are profoundly personal: my firstborn child was brought into the world in Seattle, and both of my sisters are married to American citizens.

Because I love both my homeland and the country where my career, my children, and my extended family reside, I cannot remain silent. The current systematic attacks on the separation of church and state in the United States are not just political shifts. To me, they are a deeply alarming, prophetic reality hitting close to home.

At Southern Adventist University, I deeply studied the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Bible prophecy. Revelation 13:11 depicts a beast rising from the earth with "two horns like a lamb," which Ellen G. White identified as the United States (The Great Controversy, p. 441). Those lamb-like horns symbolize the twin pillars of American greatness: civil liberty and religious freedom.

As a nurse, I know that true healing requires a patient's free consent. God operates the exact same way. He established the boundary of state power when He commanded us to "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). The state has absolutely no jurisdiction over a person's conscience. When legislative bodies and courtrooms cross that line to enforce religious dogmas, they begin to speak "as a dragon." They strip away the very liberty that made America a beacon of hope for my family.

What we are witnessing today is exactly what Ellen G. White predicted over a century ago. She foretold a time when Protestantism in America would stretch its hands across the gulf to clasp hands with the papacy, leading the government to use civil power to enforce religious traditions (The Great Controversy, p. 588).

When the state uses its power to mandate religious observances, it creates an "image to the beast." This is a mirror image of the oppressive papal system of the Dark Ages. As a family man who has lived and worked from coast to coast, it breaks my heart to see the nation where my firstborn was born actively tearing down the wall of separation that protects us all.

This political erosion has a tragic spiritual consequence. It is designed to blind people from the vital warnings found in the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14:

Silencing the First Angel: The call to "worship him that made heaven, and earth" (Revelation 14:7) points directly to the Creator's biblical law. State-enforced religion substitutes human authority for God's authority, confusing the masses.

Obscuring the Second Angel: The warning that "Babylon is fallen" (Revelation 14:8) exposes the unscriptural union of church and state. When churches rely on civil laws to enforce their dogmas, it proves they have lost their spiritual power.

Paving the Way for the Mark: The final warning against receiving the mark of the beast (Revelation 14:9-10) directly concerns a state-enforced religious monopoly. Tearing down church-state separation sets the stage for a national Sunday law, forcing a conflict between human tradition and God's commandments.

As a nurse, a brother, a father, and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I stand firmly against any encroachment on religious liberty. To use the sword of the state to enforce matters of faith is a direct assault on the free will God gave to every human being. I object to this dangerous trajectory because it threatens the future of my children, my family, and the prophetic

mission we have been called to give to the world.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Phillip Ritchey

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of religious liberty commision
Date: Wed, 08 Jul 2026 15:46:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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

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We remain, Yours truly,

Denise Hunt
Proud and Grateful American Citizen

[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
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#sda #adventist #adventista

From: Patricia Sue <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Wed, 08 Jul 2026 19:13:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

News and commentary from a Biblical world view on current events, top stories, social trends and political and religious events.

Urgent Appeal: Defend Religious Liberty Before July 13

July 7, 2026 by Andy Roman Leave a Comment



The President's Religious Liberty Commission has opened a formal public comment period, allowing individuals the opportunity to submit written feedback and express their concerns regarding the Commission's work and recommendations. The deadline for submitting comments is July 13, 2026, making this a limited window to have your voices heard. Those who value the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state should prayerfully consider participating in this process.

Below is a sample letter prepared by Seventh-day Adventist attorney Jay Cameron that may be used as a guide when contacting the Religious Liberty Commission. You may personalize it if you wish. If you are concerned about preserving genuine religious liberty and protecting freedom of conscience for all people, please take a few moments to submit your comments before the July 13, 2026 deadline. Your voice can help maintain the constitutional safeguards that have long protected the religious freedom of all Americans.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Via EMAIL: PII

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

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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,

Pat Sue

[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: M Joh <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission objections
Date: Wed, 08 Jul 2026 22:37:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

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.

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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.

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that, “In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments.”

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We remain, Yours truly,

Lynda Johnson (along with the Seventh day Adventist church)

From: Kari Irvine <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Commission Report
Date: Thu, 09 Jul 2026 14:35:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who cares deeply about religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and the separation of church and state.

Because of my faith, I do not view the separation of church and state as hostility toward religion. I view it as one of the strongest protections religion has. It protects the church from being controlled, favored, funded, pressured, or used by the government. It also protects people of all faiths, (and people of no faith), from being coerced by the religious views of those in power.

For that reason, I am deeply concerned by recommendations in the draft report that appear to weaken the separation of church and state, especially the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment and any recommendations that would expand government funding of religious activities.

As a Christian, I believe the church should answer to God, not to politicians, political parties, or government funding priorities. When churches become entangled with partisan politics or dependent on government support, it does not strengthen the church. It risks corrupting its mission and damaging its witness.

Seventh-day Adventists have historically understood religious liberty as a matter of conscience, not merely as a privilege for whichever religious group has the most cultural or political influence at a given moment. True religious liberty must protect everyone equally. The government should not favor one faith tradition over another, pressure public institutions toward religious conformity, or invite churches into partisan political activity.

I support strong protections for the free exercise of religion. People should not be punished for sincerely held religious beliefs. But free exercise is not strengthened by weakening church-state separation. It is protected by maintaining government neutrality and preserving a clear boundary between civil authority and religious authority.

I respectfully ask the Commission to revise the report to affirm, rather than undermine, the separation of church and state; to preserve and enforce the Johnson Amendment; and to avoid recommendations that would use public funds to support religious activities.

Religious liberty is too important to be treated as a partisan issue. It belongs to all of us, and it is safest when the government does not control, fund, favor, or politicize the church.

Sincerely,

Kari Irvine
Tennessee

From: Izabel Sigulinsky <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protest Against Union of Church and State
Date: Thu, 09 Jul 2026 20:14:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am writing this message to protest the decision to unite church and state. I am a strong Seventh-Day Adventist believer and I believe this decision goes against what this country stands for.

- Izabel Jordan

From: Bert Logan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: Bert Logan <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom
Date: Thu, 09 Jul 2026 21:47:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern:

As a committed Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, I believe in, and also believe, that the Bible supports the separation of Church and State.

Separation of church and state matters because history shows that mixing the two corrupts both institutions rather than strengthening either.

Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island and an early architect of the idea, warned that once a breach opens in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, the church itself suffers for it.

James Madison echoed this from the founders' side, insisting that the separation between religion and government in the Constitution of the United States had to be firmly guarded.

Some of Madison's quotes:

"Because we hold it for 'a fundamental and undeniable truth', 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."

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

"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?"

" Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Ellen White, in *The Great Controversy*, warned that any blending of the two — however slight — does in reality but bring the church nearer to the world rather than the reverse.

Consistent with this, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has formally stated that efforts to legislate faith are by their very nature in opposition to the principles of true religion, since genuine devotion to God cannot be produced by civil law.

Together our voices point to the same conclusion: faith coerced by the state ceases to be faith, and a church entangled with political power loses its spiritual integrity.

May God continue to bless all Americans, with the freedom to choose or to be free from, any religion.

Sincerely,
Bert Logan

Sent from my iPhone

From: Andrea Keele <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State Separation Concerns
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 01:10:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

To those whom it concerns,

I am very concerned with the direction leadership of our government is taking in ignoring the clause that states that congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. The heart and the conscience can never be governed by law and to take intentional steps in that direction is to violate a higher law of the same God you believe you are honoring. As a practicing Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, I believe He is a God of free will, who wins us with His love—not force.

Thank you for serious consideration of these matters. As a citizen and a Christian, I am asking you to not move forward in any way that removes the separation between church and state.

Sincerely,

Andrea Keele

From: Sharon Tanghal <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments.
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 02:18:28 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a long time California resident, I would like to express my concerns regarding the draft report released by the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty which President Trump accepted in the Oval Office.

I have objections and concerns regarding the funding religious non-profit activities. I also have objections to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses. I also have concerns with repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts the church's political activities and strongly urge our government that the Johnson Amendment be FULLY ENFORCED. I also have objections to special treatment given Jewish people and the state of Israel. There needs to be complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.

I speak as a female Seventh Day Adventist, Sabbath keeping Christian who believe in the teachings of Bible and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. My parents were immigrants from the Philippines and believe in the American dream. One of the things we appreciate in America is the Freedom we can appreciate and that means the freedom of exercising the religion of our choice and not favoring one religious belief over another.

Thank you for your time in considering these concerns.

Sharon Tanghal
Chino Hills, California
[redacted]

From: "Brauer, Jonathan" <BrauerJ@gc.adventist.org>
To: "RLC@usdoj.gov" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 04:08:31 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please stand with freedom of religion, freedom from religion, free exercise or non-exercise of. Our relationship and obedience to God is destroyed when men try to use the law to enforce it. A religion of the heart either becomes a religion of hypocrisy or of forced obedience or of breaking man's law in opposition to one's personal understanding of and attempt to be loyal to God's law. Please let God be God and man be man. Don't judge or legislate what should remain issues of the heart between God and man. God does not need man's laws to protect his desire for a CHOICE based relationship with each one of us.

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From: Pieter Damsteegt <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Preserve the Separation of Church and State as a Safeguard for Religious Freedom
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 06:43:20 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to urge the Commission to reaffirm the importance of maintaining a clear separation between church and state as a cornerstone of religious liberty in the United States.

The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and prohibits the establishment of religion. These are not competing principles… they work together. Government should never interfere with a person's sincere religious convictions, nor should it elevate one faith tradition over another.

As James Madison, the principal author of the Constitution, wrote in *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (1785): **"The Religion… 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."** That understanding remains just as relevant today. Matters of faith belong to the individual conscience, not to the civil government.

History demonstrates why this principle matters. Throughout the world, whenever governments have aligned themselves with a particular religion, minority faiths have often suffered discrimination, coercion, or exclusion. America's unique commitment to religious liberty has allowed people of every faith (and those of no faith) to live according to their conscience without fear of government favoritism.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I recognize that my own denomination has historically championed religious liberty because our founders understood that today's majority can become tomorrow's minority. Rights that protect one faith today protect all faiths tomorrow.

Religious belief is most authentic when it is freely chosen, not encouraged or discouraged by the state. Government is responsible for protecting civil rights, public safety, and equal justice under the law… not determining religious truth or influencing religious practice. Likewise, houses of worship are strongest when they are accountable to their convictions rather than to political power.

A healthy separation of church and state does not diminish religion. It allows religion to flourish voluntarily while ensuring government serves all citizens equally, regardless of their beliefs.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve these longstanding constitutional protections and to recognize that safeguarding the independence of both church and state remains one of the greatest guarantees of religious freedom for every American.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Pieter Damsteegt

From: Calvin Howell <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 07:23:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Public Comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I write as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who deeply values both religious faith and religious liberty. My denomination has long defended the freedom of conscience of every person, regardless of his or her religion, because we believe that this freedom is a gift from God and one of the foundational principles upon which the United States was established.

For this reason, I respectfully oppose those portions of the Commission's report that would weaken the historic separation of church and state by encouraging greater cooperation between government and religious institutions, increasing government funding of religious activities, or repealing long-standing safeguards that have helped preserve the independence of both church and state.

As a Christian, I believe religion is essential to society. However, history teaches that the church is strongest when it depends upon God rather than upon the favor of civil government. Whenever political power and religious authority become closely united, both institutions suffer. Government begins to determine religious questions, and the church gradually exchanges its prophetic voice for political influence.

Jesus Christ Himself established a different model. He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). He never sought civil authority to advance His mission, nor did He compel anyone to believe. Instead, He appealed to the conscience through truth, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Genuine faith cannot be produced by legislation, financial incentives, or political influence. It must always remain voluntary.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have a unique appreciation for this principle because our history has taught us that religious minorities are often the first to suffer whenever government favors one religious viewpoint over another. Consequently, we defend the religious liberty of all people, including those whose beliefs differ greatly from our own. We do not seek special privileges for our faith; we seek equal liberty for every faith and for those who profess no faith at all.

The very name "Protestant" reminds us of this principle. In 1529, at the Diet of Spires, the Protestant princes protested against the attempt of civil authority to dictate matters of religion. Their protest was not primarily about securing political power for Protestantism. It was a declaration that the conscience belongs to God alone and that no earthly government possesses the authority to compel religious belief or practice. True Protestantism was born in defense of liberty of conscience, not in pursuit of governmental partnership.

It is for this reason that I am concerned by recommendations that appear to move our nation away from that historic understanding. While these proposals may be well intentioned, history repeatedly demonstrates that when government becomes involved in promoting, financing, or favoring religious activity, the rights of minority faiths are eventually endangered. What begins as support for religion often ends with government determining which religious beliefs deserve protection and which do not.

The American principle of separating church and state has never been hostile to religion. On the contrary, it has protected religion by preventing government from exercising authority over matters of conscience. This principle has allowed churches to flourish independently while preserving the equal rights of every citizen.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve this historic safeguard. Protect the free exercise of religion. Defend the rights of every citizen to worship according to conscience. At the same time, preserve the institutional separation between church and state that has served our nation so well for generations.

True religious liberty does not consist of granting religion greater access to governmental power. It consists of ensuring that every individual remains free to seek God according to conscience without coercion, favoritism, or governmental interference.

Thank you for considering these comments and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

Calvin Howell
Tennessee

From: Monica Myers <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 08:31:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=127c3b19-74b97e27-127b1ffc-c400add0b6f2-75c104a6de732ae7&q=1&e=1a46a2ff-7c1b-4253-8039-87bf1e0457f2&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=e0048257-86c1c769-e003a6b2-c400add0b6f2-234b40c1b404345f&q=1&e=1a46a2ff-7c1b-4253-8039-87bf1e0457f2&u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.masshist.org%2Fpublications%2Fadams-papers%2Findex.php%2Fview%2FPJA01dg2

#sda #adventist #adventista

From: Damon Toldon <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Damon Toldon
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 08:37:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chair Patrick, Vice Chair Carson, and Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a Christian, a Seventh-day Adventist, and a citizen who deeply values religious liberty, freedom of conscience, and the constitutional separation of church and state. I support the right of every person to worship freely, speak openly about faith, seek reasonable religious accommodation, and participate fully in public life without discrimination.

For those same reasons, I must respectfully express my grave concern and strong opposition to several conclusions and recommendations in the Commission's draft report.

The report identifies some legitimate instances in which religious students, employees, parents, healthcare workers, military personnel, and institutions may have faced unfair treatment. Religious liberty must protect Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, members of minority denominations, nonbelievers, and all others equally. Government should not suppress voluntary prayer, private religious expression, religious speech, or equal access to neutral public programs.

However, protecting religious exercise is not the same as using government power to promote religion, fund religious activities, politicize churches, or weaken the institutional boundary between civil government and religious authority.

Replacing the Wall With a "Bridge"

The report's proposal to replace the historic "wall of separation" with a "bridge between church and state" is deeply troubling. The report states that church and state can strengthen and support one another, but history shows that close alliances between political power and religious institutions frequently damage both.

The separation of church and state was not created to silence believers. It developed in large part because people of faith understood that religion is most secure when government cannot control, finance, reward, punish, or manipulate it. The Pillar of Freedom response correctly emphasizes that separation protects the church from political corruption and protects the state from religious domination.

A "bridge" allows traffic in both directions. Government funding and political influence enter the church, while religious institutions gain privileged access to civil power. This creates competition among churches for money, influence, recognition, and governmental favor. It also forces public officials to decide which beliefs, ministries, doctrines, and organizations qualify as genuinely religious.

That is not religious liberty. It is religious entanglement.

The Report's Selective Historical Account

The draft portrays the wall of separation as a largely modern invention associated with Thomas Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists and twentieth-century Supreme Court decisions. That account is incomplete.

The historical record includes Roger Williams, James Madison, dissenting Baptists, and other religious advocates who opposed government establishment and religious coercion long before the twentieth century. The Pillar of Freedom response documents that the principle of church-state separation developed through colonial disestablishment, religious dissent, and a long American tradition of protecting conscience from governmental interference.

The report's criticism of *Everson v. Board of Education* is also misleading. Although *Everson* invoked the wall metaphor, the decision upheld transportation assistance that benefited Catholic-school families. The report's effort to associate that decision with Justice Hugo Black's former Klan membership and unrelated European philosophers does not fairly address the decision's constitutional reasoning.

I recognize that modern Establishment Clause doctrine has changed and that the Supreme Court has moved away from the former *Lemon* test. Nevertheless, the First Amendment still forbids governmental establishment, coercion, denominational preference, and improper control of religion.

Repealing the Johnson Amendment

I strongly oppose the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Religious leaders must remain free to preach about morality, justice, public policy, sin, righteousness, and the responsibilities of government. Churches should not be punished merely because their teachings have political implications.

But direct candidate campaigning is different from religious teaching.

Repealing the Johnson Amendment could turn tax-exempt churches and ministries into publicly subsidized political organizations. Candidates would seek endorsements from clergy, political donors could attempt to route campaign influence through religious nonprofits, and congregations could become divided according to party loyalty.

The Commission presents repeal as liberation from government censorship, but the result may instead be deeper government scrutiny, partisan pressure, donor influence, and political corruption inside religious institutions. The Guide to Commenting and Pillar of Freedom's response properly warn that churches may begin answering to politicians and political benefactors rather than to God.

Government Funding of Religious Activities

The report recommends expanded public funding opportunities for faith-based institutions without requiring them to surrender their religious identity. Equal access to neutral government programs may be lawful, and religious organizations should not be excluded solely because they are religious.

However, there is a crucial difference between equal access to a neutral public benefit and direct taxpayer funding of worship, evangelism, religious instruction, or doctrinal activity.

Government funding of religious operations creates several dangers:

- taxpayers may be compelled to support religious teachings they reject;
- beneficiaries may experience pressure to participate in religious activities;
- publicly funded organizations may claim exemptions from nondiscrimination requirements;
- minority religions may receive less funding or recognition than politically favored groups;
- government officials may be forced to determine which religious practices qualify for support;
- churches may become financially dependent on political leaders and public grants.

When public funds are involved, there must be strong safeguards protecting beneficiaries, taxpayers, employees, and religious minorities.

Public Schools and Religious Expression

I support the right of students to pray voluntarily, wear religious messages, discuss their faith, form religious clubs under equal-access rules, and receive excused absences for religious observance. Religious students should not be treated as though their beliefs are inherently unwelcome.

But public schools must not become agencies of religious instruction or devotion.

The report does not maintain a sufficiently clear distinction between private student expression and government-sponsored religious activity. Recommendations involving religious displays, prayer programs, chaplains, and religious posters could create direct or indirect pressure on students.

Children are especially vulnerable to authority and peer influence. A religious exercise may not be truly voluntary when it is organized, promoted, supervised, or visibly endorsed by teachers, coaches, administrators, or government-supported chaplains.

Public schools may teach about religion objectively. They may not teach religion devotionally or promote one faith as superior.

School Choice and Religious Education

The report promotes universal school-choice systems in which public funding follows the child, including to religious schools.

Although current constitutional law may allow religious schools to participate in some neutral benefit programs, serious policy concerns remain. Taxpayer funding could support sectarian instruction, discriminatory admissions or employment practices, and schools with limited transparency or public accountability.

The Commission should not assume that constitutional permission automatically makes such policies wise, fair, or protective of religious liberty. Public funding may eventually bring government regulation into religious schools, weakening the very independence the report claims to protect.

Healthcare Conscience Protections

Healthcare workers should not casually be forced to personally participate in procedures that violate deeply held religious convictions when reasonable accommodation is available.

But conscience protections cannot be considered in isolation from patient rights.

Broad exemptions may permit hospitals, insurers, pharmacies, or individual providers to deny lawful and medically necessary services. Patients in emergencies, rural communities, or areas with limited providers may have no realistic alternative. Religious liberty should not allow publicly funded institutions to withhold complete medical information, refuse referrals, or deny emergency care.

The report places great emphasis on the conscience of providers while giving insufficient attention to the health, safety, dignity, and legal rights of patients.

A fair policy must protect conscience without transferring serious harm to another person.

Foster Care and Publicly Funded Religious Organizations

The same concern applies to foster care and adoption.

Religious organizations may retain their faith identity, but when they carry out governmental functions using public funds, they should not be permitted to deny qualified foster or adoptive parents solely because those applicants do not conform to the organization's religious beliefs.

The state's first obligation must be to the welfare and best interests of children. Broad religious exemptions may reduce the number of available homes, permit unequal treatment, and place institutional doctrine above the needs of vulnerable children.

Religious Liberty for Minority Faiths and Sabbath Keepers

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I am especially sensitive to the danger of allowing the majority religion to define national religious values.

A government that promotes religion today may promote the dominant form of Christianity rather than Christianity in all its diversity. Minority Christians, including those who observe the seventh-day Sabbath, should not assume that government-supported religion will always protect them.

History repeatedly demonstrates that once government acquires the authority to advance religion, it also acquires the authority to decide which religion, which holy day, which doctrine, and which practice receives protection.

True freedom of conscience requires that the government remain neutral regarding religious observance. It should protect my right to keep the Sabbath, but it should not prescribe religious observance for others or use economic policy to favor one religious day.

Government Enforcement and Ideological Power

The report recommends task forces, federal investigations, strategic litigation, hotlines, public education campaigns, funding restrictions, awards, and agency enforcement centered on its preferred understanding of religious liberty.

These powers may be used by one administration to protect favored religious claims and by another administration to advance a different ideology. No religious community should want its liberty to depend on which political party controls federal agencies.

Government power granted for a seemingly good purpose can later be used against the very people who supported it.

Religious liberty is safest when it is protected by neutral law, equal treatment, due process, and institutional limits—not political patronage.

My Request to the Commission

I respectfully urge the Commission to revise or withdraw recommendations that would:

1. replace church-state separation with a cooperative "bridge" between religious and governmental power;
2. repeal the Johnson Amendment and encourage partisan political activity by tax-exempt churches;
3. expand direct government funding of religious or devotional activities;
4. weaken nondiscrimination requirements for publicly funded religious organizations;

5. promote religious displays, prayer, or devotional influence in public schools;
6. permit conscience exemptions that impose serious harm on patients, children, workers, or service recipients;
7. privilege majority religious beliefs over minority religions and nonbelievers;
8. use federal enforcement power to advance one administration's preferred religious ideology.

I also urge the Commission to affirm the following principles:

- religious people do not surrender their rights in public life;
- voluntary religious expression must be protected;
- no religion should receive governmental preference;
- publicly funded services must remain accessible and nondiscriminatory;
- private conscience must be protected without inflicting substantial harm on others;
- churches must remain free from political control, dependency, and corruption;
- government must protect religious liberty equally for believers, minority faiths, Sabbath keepers, and nonbelievers.

The First Amendment protects religion from government interference, but it also protects the people from government-imposed religion. Weakening either side of that balance threatens the liberty of all.

As Jesus taught:

Mark 12:17: "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."

Religious devotion belongs to God and the individual conscience. Civil government should neither suppress it nor control, finance, politicize, or prescribe it.

I respectfully ask the Commission to preserve the separation of church and state rather than replace it. That separation does not weaken faith. It protects faith from political corruption and protects every citizen's freedom of conscience.

Thank you for considering my public comment.

Respectfully submitted,

Damon Toldon

From: William Latham <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 08:52:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

My name is William Bradley Latham, I'm from Texarkana, Texas, and I'm a disabled veteran of the Iraqi freedom war. My mental health Psychologist's and Psychiatrist's call me overly religious.

I've heard many claims that the constitution never says anything about separation of Church And State, and I'm confounded by that. Have we forgotten history? Why was the United States of America created? We were running from the tyranny of the Catholic Church! Why are y'all trying to bring us back under the dominion of the very power we were initially running to escape?
The very first amendment to the constitution, written while all the authors of the constitution were still alive, was and is, "congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of any religion!" How is that not separation of church and state.
Congress=State / Religion=Church
If Church and State combine then the question is what Church? Fact-of-the-matter is I know where this very thing tends, just as I understand Revelations and Daniel, but do you? Obviously not, especially trying to push Sunday worship laws (Blue Laws) which will get more and more severe, ultimately ending in the death decree being passed to all those who refuse to worship on Sunday. What happens after that? Plagues fall upon the disobedient, so you'll be bringing your own doom upon yourself. Lord Jesus knows, I tried to keep the Sunday, in my past I worshiped with several Sunday churches, Baptist, Church of Christ, Pentecostal, Methodist, and the like, but could never be faithful towards God because of it.
I could not find the firm faith built upon the Rock in Sunday churches, because ALL of them have contradictions in their doctrines.
Want me to show you?
Easy. Here's an example:
Malachi 3:6 NKJV "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob."
Yet ALL Sunday keepers say that God "CHANGED" the Sabbath from Saturday To Sunday.
Huh,
Did you not just read that verse, it says, God doesn't change.
God isn't the author of confusion.
Contradictions=Confusion
1 Corinthians 14:33 NKJV "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."
Where then did such a change come from?
Not by the apostles, as many claim, oh no.
The change came by the Catholic Church in the council of Laodicea 334A.D, where they transferred the solemnity of the weekly observance from Saturday to Sunday and in so doing they committed apostasy which is a renounciation of one's previous loyalties according to their faith. 2 Thessalonians 2 talks about a great falling away. The beginning title of that chapter speaks of a great apostasy.
It took me many years of self inflicted hardships to find the truth, but not before I was broken, humbled, and out of my own ideas. I was up against a felony 3rd DWI, I couldn't stop drinking and using drugs, until I found the truth while incarcerated. Everytime I went to jail, I'd devour the word of God all day long, literally, day in and day out, nights too, that's all I would do. Trying to find answers on how I could begin living a life of victory and freedom.
So one day, in prayer, I asked the Lord in the most humble prayer I've ever spoken. "Lord, I don't even know what's missing in my life so I don't even know what to ask for, but I know that you know what's missing, and I know this can't be the life of victory you have available for me as powerful as your word says you are. Will you supply for me whatever is missing?" The Lord surely did answer as I learned from the Seventh Day Adventist

Church the truth I serve Him in today. I am a Christian in the realest sense of the word. I used to be a drug user, alcoholic, fornicate, (when I worshiped on Sunday) and Jesus Christ changed me and gave me victory over that lifestyle. I worship on the Sabbath, Saturday, because God commanded to do so. Moreover I am a Seventh Day Adventist, because our doctrine doesn't have contradictions! Can't say that as a Sunday keeper. Making laws respecting the establishment of Sunday churches would restrict my liberties I fought for in war. Even Jesus Himself separated Church and State.

Did you know that?

OK, I'll show you.

Matthew 22:17-21 NKJV "Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" [18] But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? [19] Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius. [20] And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" [21] They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

These Pharisees and Herodians were trying to trip up Jesus and get Him to sin in some way, they asked Him if it's right to pay taxes and submit to government authority? Jesus asked for the coin, and whose inscription was on it, Ceasars they answered. Then He said, Render therefore unto Ceasar the things that are Caesar's ||||| and ||||| to God the thing's that are God's.

Jesus made a clear distinction and separation between the two entities. Unto Ceasar may belong the things of this world, but unto God belong the things not of this world, our characters, intelligence, beliefs, convictions, and even the Sabbath of which these SUNday laws attempt to overthrow.

Yes the Sabbath will be kept in heaven, not SUNday.

Need proof?

Isaiah 66:22-23 NKJV "For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain. [23] And it shall come to pass That from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD."

I wonder what would have happened, if instead, the Pharisees had come to Jesus with a message from Ceasar and said, Ceasar commands that you should take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, right now!

Do you think Jesus should submit to that command to disobey God and submit to the earthly powers?

I believe Jesus inspired Peter when saying,

Acts 5:29 NKJV "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

From: Jackie Smith <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep Church and State Separate
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 08:52:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a conservative Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I encourage the commission to keep a strong separation between church and state. As our forefathers set out for this country Americans should have the freedom to worship as they please. Because of God's love for humanity, He gave us the power of choice to serve Him or not. Who is man to try to legislate how we should live and worship?

I fear for my freedom to worship on Sabbath—the Bible Sabbath—merely because someone assumes that if I don't worship on Sunday, I'm not religious.

Thank you for guarding my freedoms and those of millions of other Americans.

Jackie O Smith

From: Gary Davis <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 09:43:04 -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.

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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,

Gary L Davis
PII

[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

#sda #adventist #adventista

From: Kim Swarts <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Kim Swarts
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 10:47:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I hope you will take the time to read and carefully consider my comments.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I belong to a faith community that has long stood at the forefront of defending religious liberty, not only for ourselves, but for people of every faith and those with no faith at all. Because of that heritage, I was deeply troubled to read that the Commission is considering removing or weakening the historic wall of separation between church and state.

I believe our nation's founders recognized that this separation was essential to protecting freedom of conscience. It was never intended to diminish religion. Rather, it was established to protect the church from government influence and to protect government from becoming entangled in matters of faith.

Even if proposed changes are presented as a compromise, I believe they would move our country in the wrong direction. Once the wall between church and state is weakened, governments inevitably become involved in deciding religious matters. Throughout history, this has often led to discrimination and persecution against those whose sincerely held religious convictions differ from those of the majority.

I do not see removing this wall as progress. I see it as a retreat from one of America's greatest protections: the freedom for every person to worship—or not worship—according to conscience.

The wall separating church and state was not built to keep religion down. It was built to keep the church free. A bridge (Compromise)between church and state does not strengthen either institution. Instead, it opens the door for government funding, political influence, and public pressure to shape religious organizations. Churches should answer to God and their convictions, not to government officials or political interests.

For that reason, I specifically object to:

- Government funding of religious nonprofit activities.
- Government funding of religious education or religious clubs on public school campuses.
- Repealing the Johnson Amendment. I believe the Johnson Amendment should remain in place and be fully enforced so that churches are not drawn into partisan political activity.

I also believe our government should remain neutral in its relationship with all religions. While the United States may maintain diplomatic relationships with nations, it should not grant special preference or favored status to any particular religion or religious community. Equal treatment under the law is one of the foundations of true religious liberty.

My convictions are based on the belief that once the wall between church and state is removed, the government will inevitably become involved in religious questions. History repeatedly shows that this leads to the state determining religious practice and doctrine, and ultimately to the loss of liberty for people of faith whose beliefs differ from those in power.

Please reconsider any position that weakens this vital constitutional principle. Preserving the separation between church and state is one of the best ways to protect the religious freedom of every American, regardless of their faith.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Kim Swarts
Dunlap, Tennessee

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of the Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 10:49:39 -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]

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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.

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We remain, Yours truly,
Elder Garry Dunning

[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=e6f52368-8345c6e8-e6f2078d-74fe486959fc-59bf1a88491e8471&q=1&e=70133ec4-098f-4803-8a82-0b9eceb099a6&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
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[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=589c9fee-3d2c7a6e-589bbb0b-74fe486959fc-7bd2e7c5c88366ef&q=1&e=70133ec4-098f-4803-8a82-0b9eceb099a6&u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.masshist.org%2Fpublications%2Fadams-papers%2Findex.php%2Fview%2FPJA01dg2

#sda #adventist #adventista

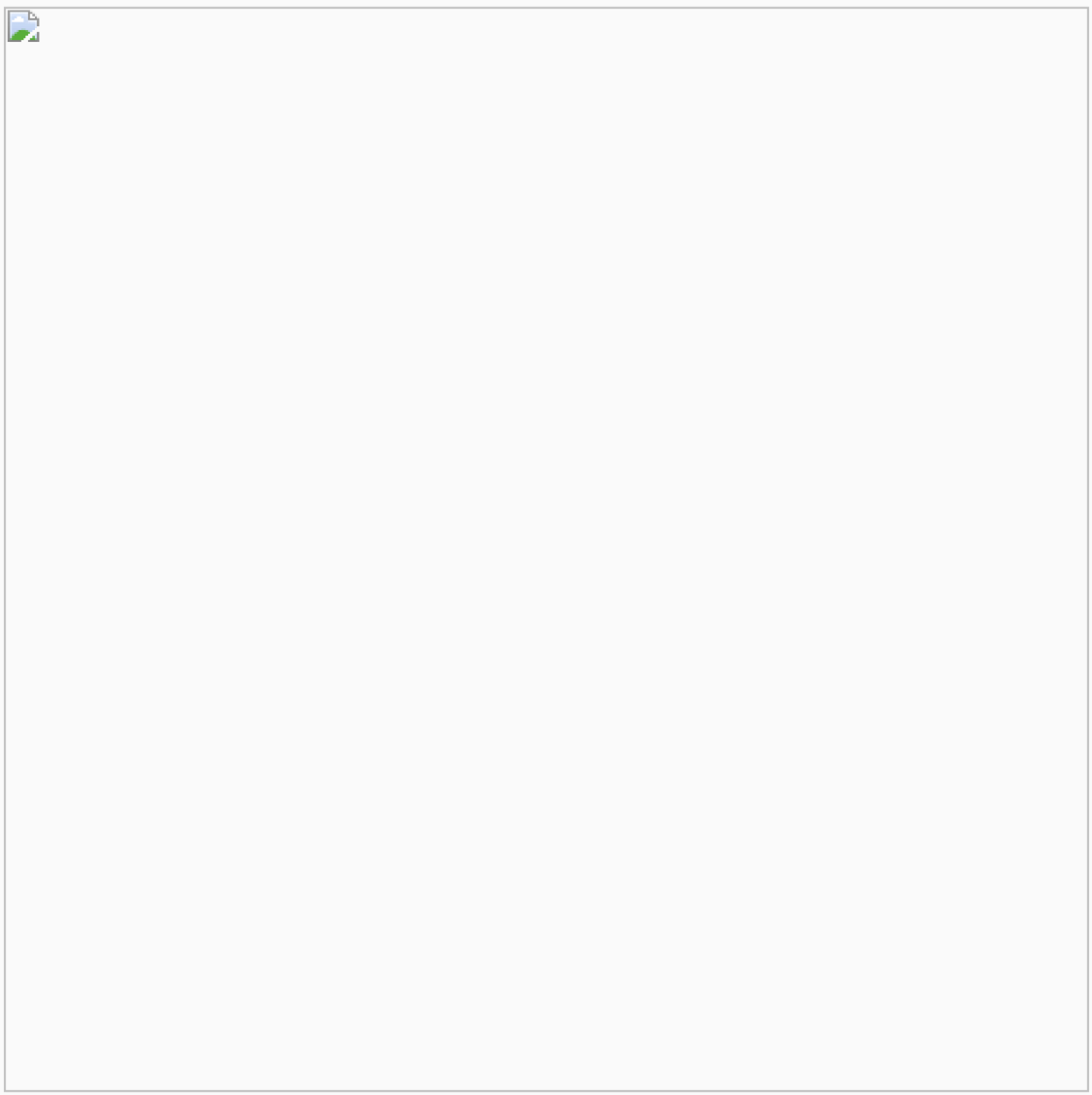
From: Honor7th <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fw: Urgent Appeal: Defend RaLReligious Liberty Before July 13
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 10:52:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

God is❤️
thank you

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

On Tuesday, July 7, 2026, 2:56 PM, Advent Messenger <[redacted]> wrote:



Urgent Appeal: Defend Religious Liberty Before July 13

The President's Religious Liberty Commission has opened a formal public comment period, allowing individuals the opportunity to submit written feedback and express their concerns regarding the Commission's work and recommendations. The deadline for submitting comments is July 13, 2026, making this a limited window to have your voices heard. Those who value the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state should prayerfully consider participating in this process.

Below is a sample letter prepared by Seventh-day Adventist attorney Jay Cameron that may be used as a guide when contacting the Religious Liberty Commission. You may personalize it if you wish. If you are concerned about preserving genuine religious liberty and protecting freedom of conscience for all people, please take a few moments to submit your comments before the July 13, 2026 deadline. Your voice can help maintain the constitutional safeguards that have long protected the religious freedom of all Americans.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Via EMAIL: [redacted]

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

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stated that, “In the Papal System, Government and Religion are in a manner consolidated, & that is found to be the worst of Governments.”

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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
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[11] John Adams, Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law, 1765. https://www.masshist.org/publications/adams-papers/index.php/view/PJA01dg2

This email was sent to [redacted]
why did I get this? unsubscribe from this list update subscription preferences
Advent Messenger · PO Box 96 · Dover, OK 73734-0096 · USA

From: Dave Upham <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RLC Report
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 11:30:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greeting,

My Name is David W. Upham. I reside in Arkansas and I am a credentialed LPA (LayPastoralAssistant) and Evangelist with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.
In light of the current Religious Liberty Commission's repot to the President last week, i am writing you to make it very clear that I am not in agreement with the Commission's findings, nor will I adhere to the idea that just because the phrase "separation of church and state" is not found in the constitution, that the principle does not exist either.

Our founding fathers worked hard to bring together a document that would bring together the principles and fundamental ideas of a society where freedom and religious liberty would stand front and center. To now come up with ways to get around the obstacles of certant high ranking individuals agendas at the expense of throwing away the Biblical principles that I grew up with and cherish is not acceptable.

Therefore I denounce the concept of having no separation of church and state and I ask that the RLC reconsider the idea of tearing down a wall that cannot be rebuilt and will make the way for abuse of power by government officials.

Thank you for allowing me to share my concerns.

David W. Upham

From: David Ball <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION – JOHNSON AMENDMENT
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 12:15:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

I trust the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty acted in good faith and had good intentions with the June 2026 publication of the draft report.

However, I take issue with this recommendation:

"The Commission's first recommendation is for the President to advocate for the passage of federal legislation repealing the Johnson Amendment as an unconstitutional restriction on the religious speech of houses of worship and faith-based non-profits."

The report states that "There is one major threat to the right of faith leaders to speak freely: The Johnson Amendment, a 1954 provision of the U.S. tax code that prohibits 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations, including churches, from endorsing one candidate over another."

The report added, for emphasis: "Testimony from religious leaders indicated that the Johnson Amendment continues to have a chilling effect on religious leaders' ability to provide religious guidance to their communities."

I have worshipped as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian since 1984, and during my four decades plus in this Protestant faith community, I have not observed a "chilling effect" due to guidelines imposed by the Johnson Amendment. Rather, I contend this is an effective policy to guard against the intrusion of secular politics into the sacred realm. Pastors, priests, rabbis, and other speakers are free to engage in dialogue regarding sacred values and principles, and encourage civic engagement and thoughtful voting, without promoting political candidates or endorsing partisan positions.

As Jesus clearly stated in Matthew 22:21, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Our nation is deeply divided due to exploitation of political, cultural, racial, religious, and economic differences, and there is no need to amplify the division during the Sabbath (whether one chooses to worship on Saturday or Sunday) with policy rhetoric and candidate endorsements.

Thank you for your consideration. Blessings!

Reply to David Ball at [redacted] or [redacted]

From: Classeenford Louis <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment Opposing the Erosion of Church–State Separation and Defending Religious Liberty
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 14:32:44 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this public comment out of deep concern for the preservation of religious liberty in the United States. I urge the Commission to reject any recommendation that would weaken the historic constitutional principle of separating church and state or encourage greater cooperation between religious institutions and civil government.

America has long stood as a beacon of religious liberty because our Constitution protects every person's God-given right to worship according to conscience without governmental coercion. The First Amendment wisely prevents the establishment of religion while protecting the free exercise of religion. These protections have allowed people of every faith—and those of no faith—to live together in peace and freedom.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe the Bible plainly teaches that the future civil enforcement of Sunday observance will constitute the mark of the beast described in Revelation 13:16–17 and warned against in Revelation 14:9–12. Bible prophecy reveals that this will occur through a union of church and state, when civil authority enforces religious observance in violation of God's commandments. For this reason, preserving the constitutional separation of church and state is essential to protecting liberty of conscience for all Americans.

History repeatedly demonstrates the dangers of allowing civil government to enforce religious beliefs or practices. During America's colonial period, Baptists, Quakers, Jews, seventh-day Sabbath keepers, and many other religious minorities suffered discrimination, imprisonment, fines, and persecution because certain churches were supported by the state.

The experience of Seventh-day Adventists during the nineteenth century provides another solemn warning. Faithful Sabbath keepers were prosecuted, fined, imprisoned, and even forced into chain gangs under Sunday laws because they chose to obey the Fourth Commandment rather than conform to state-enforced Sunday observance. Their only offense was remaining faithful to the dictates of conscience and the Word of God.

The medieval Inquisition further demonstrates the tragic consequences of combining religious authority with civil power. Likewise, governments that have established religion or officially opposed religion have repeatedly violated the liberty of conscience. Although these systems differed in ideology, they shared the same dangerous principle: civil authority exercising power over matters of faith.

The Bible teaches that faith must always be voluntary. Jesus Christ never compelled anyone to worship Him through civil authority. Instead, He invited people to follow Him freely. The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel through persuasion, love, and the power of the Holy Spirit—not through legislation or governmental coercion. Likewise, the proper role of civil government is to preserve order, protect individual rights, and administer justice equally without compelling religious observance.

The constitutional separation of church and state protects believers and nonbelievers alike. It prevents government from establishing religion while ensuring that every citizen remains free to worship according to conscience. Weakening this principle places every religious minority at risk and opens the door to future violations of religious liberty.

For those of us who believe the prophetic warnings of Scripture, preserving this constitutional safeguard is not merely a political issue but a matter of faithfulness to God. Revelation warns of a coming crisis in which religious worship will be enforced by civil authority. The Constitution's protection of liberty of conscience stands as one of the greatest safeguards against such coercion.

I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to reject any recommendation that would diminish the separation of church and state or encourage government involvement in religious matters. Religious liberty is best preserved when government neither establishes religion nor interferes with the free exercise of religion, but instead protects the equal rights of every citizen to follow the convictions of conscience.

May the United States continue to uphold the principles of liberty upon which it was founded and preserve the precious freedom of conscience for future generations.

Respectfully submitted,

Claseenford Louis.

From: Grace Mackintosh <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission Report - Grace Mackintosh
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 15:15:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a concerned Seventh-day Adventist Christian in Canada. What the United States does. The world follows. It matters what decision are made with regard to this issue.

Separation of church and state was instituted by Jesus Christ in the gospels in Matthew 22:21 when he indicated we should render unto government what is due the government and to God what is Gods.

Further, Jesus was crucified because of a church state union. We are all guilty of Jesus death but the method in which it was carried out should be a warning to us all.

The leaders of the Jewish religious economy (chief priests and elders) came forward to Pilate - the state representative - and pressed their desire for His death. Pilate - vacillating and weak asked the people for their determination. He died not expect that they would demand His death. And Pilate was caught. And our Saviour was crucified.

Church state separation keeps both the church and the state from corruption around leagues and intrigues. And keeps people from hypocrisy.

The Johnson amendment isn't much protection against church-state backroom agreements. But it is a layer of protection we cannot afford to lose.

In the words of Thomas Jefferson:

"*The* spirit of the times may alter, will alter. *Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may commence persecution, and better men be his victims. It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and* their rights disregarded. *They will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights*. the shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war, will remain on us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion."-*Thomas Jefferson, Notes on Virginia, query XVII*

"Religious legislation is steadily gaining favor in the public mind, and if church state separation is dissolved it will intrench itself more and more strongly in the law of the land. In defiance of specific constitutional provisions, in violation of the fundamental principles of American institutions, and contrary to the plain words of Jesus Christ, religious observances will be given the sanction of law, and in pursuance thereof will be by the power of the State enforced. The chief, the most comprehensive, and the most far-reaching of all these observances will be the Sunday, as Blackstone observes, "vulgarly (but improperly) called Sabbath."

The Constitution of the State of Tennessee, Article I, under the title of "Bill of Rights," declares thus:-
"Sec. 3. That all men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience; that no man can, of right, be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or to maintain any ministry

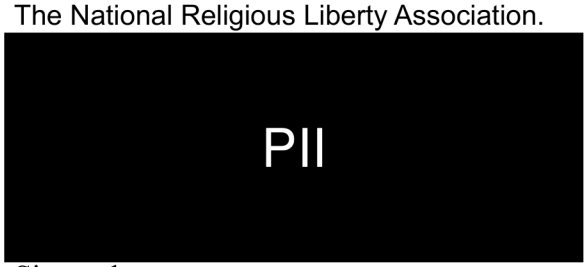
against his consent; that no human authority can, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience; and that no preference shall ever be given, by law, to any religious establishment or mode of worship."

"The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects religious liberty. "

"No one thought of vindicating religion for the conscience of *the individual* until a voice in Judea, breaking day for the greatest epoch in the life of humanity by establishing a pure, spiritual, and universal religion for all mankind, enjoined to render to CÊsar only that which is CÊsar's. The rule was upheld during the infancy of the gospel for all men. No sooner was this religion adopted by the chief of the Roman empire than it was shorn of its character of universality and enthralled by an unholy connection with the
unholy State. And so it continued until the new nation, . . . when it came to establish a Government for the United States, refused to treat faith as a matter to be regulated by a corporate body, or having a headship in a monarch or a State. Vindicating the *right of*
individuality even in religion, and *in religion above all*, the new nation dared to set the example of accepting in its relations to God the principle first divinely ordained of God in Judea."
And then, as though to emphasize the specific statements thus made, the writer declares that thus "*perfect individuality* is secured to conscience" by the United States Constitution. As a matter of fact,
in the realm of conscience there is no other right than the right of the individual conscience. There is no such thing as a collective or corporate conscience. There is no such thing as a sectarian conscience. Conscience pertains solely to the individual. It is the individual's own view of his personal relation of faith and obedience to God, and can exist only between the individual and God. Thus the right of religious belief inheres in *the individual*, and is only the exercise of the belief of the individual as his own thought shall lead him with respect to God and his duty toward
God, according to the dictates of his own conscience. And as this is the inherent, absolute, and inalienable right of every individual, as many individuals as may choose to do so have the right to associate
themselves together for mutual aid and encouragement."

Taken from Pages 20-24 of **"Due Process of Law" and The Divine Right of Dissent**

A REVIEW
By Alonzo T. Jones
[Religious Liberty Library, No. 1]
Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off; for truth has fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.-*Isaiah 59:14.*
The National Religious Liberty Association.



Sincerely
Grace Mackintosh

From: David Oh <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – David Oh
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 15:23:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and I am writing to let you know that I am completely against the breaking down of the wall of separation between Church and State.

As history has shown throughout the world, combining Church and State has always led to persecution of religious people.

Therefore I am completely and utterly against this building of a bridge between Church and State. Please keep it separate and let the wall stand firm to protect the people from exercising their rights to worship as they see fit.

God bless,

From: Grace Mackintosh <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission Report - Grace Mackintos
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 15:46:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a concerned Seventh-day Adventist Christian in Canada. What the United States does. The world follows. It matters what decisions are made with regard to this issue.

Separation of church and state was instituted by Jesus Christ in the gospels in Matthew 22:21 when he indicated we should render unto government what is due the government and to God what is God's.

Further, Jesus was crucified because of a church state union. We are all guilty of Jesus' death but the method in which it was carried out should be a warning to us all.

The leaders of the Jewish religious economy (chief priests and elders) came forward to Pilate - the state representative - and pressed their desire for His death. Pilate - vacillating and weak - asked the people for their determination. He did not expect that they would demand His death - and Pilate was caught. And our Saviour was crucified.

Church state separation keeps both the church and the state from corruption. And keeps people from hypocrisy.

The Johnson amendment isn't much protection against church-state backroom agreements. But it is a layer of protection we cannot afford to lose.

In the words of Thomas Jefferson:

"*The* spirit of the times may alter, will alter. *Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may commence persecution, and better men be his victims. It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and* their rights disregarded. *They will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights*. the shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war, will remain on us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion."-*Thomas Jefferson, Notes on Virginia, query XVII*

"Religious legislation is steadily gaining favor in the public mind, and if church state separation is dissolved it will intrench itself more and more strongly in the law of the land. In defiance of specific constitutional provisions, in violation of the fundamental principles of American institutions, and contrary to the plain words of Jesus Christ, religious observances will be given the sanction of law, and in pursuance thereof will be by the power of the State enforced. The chief, the most comprehensive, and the most far-reaching of all these observances will be the Sunday, as Blackstone observes, "vulgarly (but improperly) called Sabbath."

The Constitution of the State of Tennessee, Article I, under the title of "Bill of Rights," declares thus:-
"Sec. 3. That all men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience; that no man can, of right, be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or to maintain any ministry

against his consent; that no human authority can, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience; and that no preference shall ever be given, by law, to any religious establishment or mode of worship."

"The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects religious liberty. "

"No one thought of vindicating religion for the conscience of *the individual* until a voice in Judea, breaking day for the greatest epoch in the life of humanity by establishing a pure, spiritual, and universal religion for all mankind, enjoined to render to CÊsar only that which is CÊsar's. The rule was upheld during the infancy of the gospel for all men. No sooner was this religion adopted by the chief of the Roman empire than it was shorn of its character of universality and enthralled by an unholy connection with the
unholy State. And so it continued until the new nation, . . . when it came to establish a Government for the United States, refused to treat faith as a matter to be regulated by a corporate body, or having a headship in a monarch or a State. Vindicating the *right of*
individuality even in religion, and *in religion above all*, the new nation dared to set the example of accepting in its relations to God the principle first divinely ordained of God in Judea."
And then, as though to emphasize the specific statements thus made, the writer declares that thus "*perfect individuality* is secured to conscience" by the United States Constitution. As a matter of fact,
in the realm of conscience there is no other right than the right of the individual conscience. There is no such thing as a collective or corporate conscience. There is no such thing as a sectarian conscience. Conscience pertains solely to the individual. It is the individual's own view of his personal relation of faith and obedience to God, and can exist only between the individual and God. Thus the right of religious belief inheres in *the individual*, and is only the exercise of the belief of the individual as his own thought shall lead him with respect to God and his duty toward
God, according to the dictates of his own conscience. And as this is the inherent, absolute, and inalienable right of every individual, as many individuals as may choose to do so have the right to associate
themselves together for mutual aid and encouragement."

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The National Religious Liberty Association.

PII

Sincerely
Grace Mackintosh
Sent from my iPhone

From: Jeff Koran <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report – Koran, Jeff and Joanna
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 15:48:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 10, 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:

Regarding the deadline of 7/13/2026 and voicing my opinion regarding the institution of the contents of that report, we (Jeff and Joanna Koran) would like to request the following:

The draft stay a draft and never gets implemented. We are apposed to some of the contents of this report and request it be rejected or at least redrafted to protect liberty of conscience for 'all' of America's citizens.

We pray you are well! We are emailing you because we are Seventh Day Adventist's, but more than that we are fundamentalist Christian. Here are some comments that we are sure you already are aware of:

1. Separation of church and state is key to our individual rights and freedoms. Please do not undermine this very important piece of our nations history. Studying the Bible and seeing the ways of this world through its lens have given us much insight to how important it is to - not - combine the two institutions. Those that keep God's True Commandments and have The Faith of Jesus Christ will suffer great persecution at the hands of those 'thinking' they are doing God's work. You may already know this so this might not be a new thought.

Institutions and people that advocate for this continued separation:
Institutions like: Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Freedom from Religion Foundation, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism.
People like: John Nevins Andrews, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Williams, SDAs, etc.

2. The repealing of the Johnson Act: Please do not allow this to happen. Do we really want the corruption of the government to seep into the churches and religious groups in our country?

Thank your for taking the time to read our objections to the draft as it is written currently. We hope to see a new amended draft that will be more careful in carrying forward the freedoms of conscience in our country.

May God bless you,

Jeff and Joanna Koran

From: Laura Saladino <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - separation of Church and State - Laura Saladino
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 16:08:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I understand there is a move to stop the separation of church and state. I'm a Christian of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

I am 100% FOR separation of church and state. I believe governments have no business legislating the first four commandments of the Decalogue. God gives us freedom of conscience.

I have no problem with governments legislating the last six commandments … they deal with laws between the people

I also disagree with preferential treatment of one religion over another. I don't believe the government should be funding any religious entities. I do agree with nonprofit organizations, but this is different than funding.

When governments start legislating how to worship God, persecution is the result.

Sincerely
Laura Saladino
Chuckey, TN

From: Jo jo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Joel Ladella
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 16:48:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

I'm writing as a US citizen and a Seventh Day Adventist Christian to please reconsider the recommendations in your report that would take away the weight given in the separation of church and state. The use of government funds need to stay with the government funds, religious charities and activities need to be funded by the people of said religions. Love for others needs to come out of donations from the people, not by the government. These ideas will eventually lead to the repealing the Johnson Amendment. I strong advise against this path. Freedom is the foundation of our founding country and should stay the same for the present and the future of this great nation.

Absolute power breeds absolute corruption. Churches of any religion, including those of the Christian faith, mixed with our government will send us politically back to the middle ages where minority religious groups were persecuted. Our country allows for religious freedom, freedom comes with a cost. Counting that cost and still allowing freedom to reign is what makes America so wonderful and safe.

Separation of government and church was not made up by secular ideals but by men of faith who knew what this combination led to, the oppression and loss of freedom. Please continue to always keep all churches of all faiths separate from the state. This is the only way to keep all citizens and all those residing in our country free.

Sincerely,

--
Joel Ladella

From: Laura Marte <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I support religious liberty
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 16:55:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

I SUPPORT RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, I DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE GOVERNMENT BEING INVOLVED IN RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS. OUR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY MUST ALWAYS BE PROTECTED BECAUSE THAT IS WHAT OUR CONSTITUTION WAS FOUNDED ON. PLEASE ALLOW PEOPLE TO HAVE FREEDOM IN CHOOSING THEIR RELIGION. I AM A PROUD 7 DAY ADVENTIST AND JESUS IS KING! THANK YOU!

ATTE.: Laura Perez
Sent from my iPhone

From: L Fairchild <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -- Separation of Church and State -- Lisa Fairchild
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 17:34:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am very concerned that the wall between church and state be maintained and guarded, so that the USA can continue to flourish as a country where anyone is free to practice any religion. The separation of church and state keeps people of faith and churches free from interference from the state. Please do not weaken the separation of church and state, as your report suggests.

I am a Christian, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Seventh-day Adventists have often had to defend their own right to freedom of religion, even in the USA, due to not worshipping on Sunday, as the majority of Christians do. We respect their right to worship on Sunday, and ask for respect in return to keep Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

If there is a "bridge" built between church and state in this country, this will lead to a power struggle between faiths and between church and state. Our government needs to be neutral towards the practice of religion.

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

Sincerely,
Lisa Fairchild
Antelope, California

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report Draft
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 17:45:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Commission Members,

In 1888 a man by the name of A.T. Jones testified before Congress against the Blair Bill. That testimony stands as one of the clearest, most forceful defenses of the American principle of church–state separation ever delivered in a federal hearing. His argument against Senator Blair's proposed National Sunday Rest Bill demonstrated—using the Constitution, American legal tradition, and the nature of civil government—that legislating religious observance is both unconstitutional and fundamentally un-American.

Summary of A.T. Jones' Testimony Against the Blair Bill (1888)

Core argument: Jones insisted that **civil government has no authority to enforce religious observances**, including Sunday rest, because such observances are inherently religious, not civil. He repeatedly emphasized the distinction between **moral law** (which belongs to God and conscience) and **civil law** (which governs actions between people).

Key points he made:

- **Sunday observance is religious**, rooted in Christian doctrine, not in civil necessity. Therefore, the state cannot legislate it without violating the First Amendment.
- **No American can support legislation enforcing his own religious observances without forfeiting his own religious liberty**, because once the state gains power to enforce *any* religious practice, it gains power to enforce *all* religious practices.
- **The Constitution forbids the union of religious and civil power**, and the proposed bill would create exactly such a union by giving the federal government authority to enforce a religious institution.
- **True Americanism requires protecting minority conscience**, not enforcing majority religious practice.
- Jones highlighted that **civil government exists to protect rights, not to compel virtue or worship**.

Jones' testimony was so compelling—and so disruptive to the committee's assumptions—that he was interrupted **169 times in 90 minutes**, far more than any other speaker.

How Jones' Testimony Refutes the Religious Liberty Commission's Claim That Church–State Separation Is "Un-American" and "Unconstitutional"

The Religious Liberty Commission's statement asserts that separation of church and state is un-American and unconstitutional. Jones' testimony directly contradicts this claim on multiple levels:

1. Jones shows that separation of church and state is explicitly American, rooted in the Constitution.

He repeatedly appealed to:

- **The First Amendment**
- **The nature of civil government as defined by American founders**
- **The inalienable rights of conscience**

His argument:

Any law enforcing religious observance violates the Constitution's prohibition on establishing religion and infringes on free exercise. This is not his opinion—it is a constitutional fact.

Thus, Jones demonstrates that **church–state separation is not only American, but essential to American liberty**.

2. Jones shows that combining church and state is what is actually un-American.

He argued that:

- The American system was deliberately designed to avoid the Old World model of religious legislation.
- The Blair Bill represented a regression toward European-style religious establishments.
- The moment the state enforces religious observance, **it ceases to be American in principle**, even if it remains American in geography.

This directly refutes the Commission's claim: **It is religious legislation—not separation—that is un-American.**

3. Jones demonstrates that religious liberty collapses the moment the state enforces religious practice.

His most powerful point:

No man can allow legislation in behalf of the religious observances in which he himself believes without forfeiting his own religious freedom.
This shows that:

- Religious legislation destroys liberty for everyone—including the majority.
- Separation protects both believers and non-believers.
- Therefore, separation is the only system consistent with American ideals of liberty.

4. Jones shows that civil government has no jurisdiction over religious duties.
He argued that:

- Civil law governs human-to-human relations.
- Religious law governs human-to-God relations.
- Mixing the two is a category error and a constitutional violation.

Thus, the Commission's claim that separation is unconstitutional is refuted by Jones' demonstration that **religious legislation itself violates constitutional boundaries.**
In Summary
Jones' testimony proves that:

- Separation of church and state is *the* American principle of religious liberty.
- Religious legislation is unconstitutional.
- The Blair Bill—or any similar law to connect church and state—violates the First Amendment.
- Protecting conscience requires keeping civil and religious authority distinct.
- The Religious Liberty Commission's claim reverses the actual American constitutional order.

His testimony remains one of the strongest historical rebuttals to the idea that America was designed to enforce religious practice. Instead, Jones shows that **America was designed to protect religious freedom by preventing the combination or connection of church and state.**

I ask that you reconsider your conclusions based upon the above arguments.

Thank you,

Victor & Pamela Vaughn

Pastor, Wimbish Road
Seventh-day Adventist Church
Macon, Georgia

From: Dee Strack <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state to remain intact !!!!!!!
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 18:15:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom this may concern:
The founding authors and fathers of the United States of America's constitution clearly understood the concept of a church without a pope and a state without a king !!!!!!! Many of these men (and women/children) escaped religious tyranny, bloodshed, and annihilation due to refusal to conform to papal rule. I object to all anti-Protestant, anti-Seventh Day Adventist tru anti-religious liberty laws that compel the conscience to obey traditions and laws of men. Separation of church and state is Americas purpose and prosperity. Separation of church and state MUST REMAIN INTACT AS OUR CREATOR INTENDED !!!!!!!! I'm a Protestant Seventh Day Adventist and I object to church and state convergence/union/dissolution !!!!!!!!!!!!
Sent from my iPhone

From: Lanny Swarts <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 18:37:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I am writing to respectfully express my concern that current efforts may not be strengthening, but rather weakening, the longstanding constitutional principles that have protected religious liberty in the United States for generations.

As both a Christian and a citizen, I firmly believe that maintaining the separation of church and state is essential to preserving the freedom of conscience guaranteed by the First Amendment. This principle does not diminish religion; rather, it protects the independence of both religious institutions and civil government.

I also support preserving the Johnson Amendment, which limits partisan political activity by tax-exempt churches. Houses of worship should remain places where people of differing political views can gather in unity around shared faith rather than becoming extensions of political parties or election campaigns. The church's mission is spiritual, and its influence is strongest when it is exercised through conviction rather than political power.

History offers many sobering examples of the dangers that arise when religious institutions become closely allied with civil authority. While the circumstances have differed from one nation and era to another, the result has too often been pressure upon religious minorities, restrictions on freedom of conscience, and even persecution. Our nation's founders understood these lessons well and established constitutional safeguards to prevent such abuses.

For me, religious liberty is not merely an academic or political issue. Throughout my working career, I have depended upon legal protections that allowed me to receive a reasonable accommodation for my sincerely held religious belief regarding Sabbath observance. Because those protections exist, I have been able to remain faithful to my conscience while continuing to serve my employer faithfully. I know firsthand how important these protections are for ordinary Americans whose beliefs may differ from those of the majority.

Religious liberty belongs equally to every American—Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, atheists, and people of every other faith or no faith at all. The government should neither favor nor disadvantage any religion. Likewise, no citizen should ever be compelled, directly or indirectly, to violate his or her conscience in matters of faith.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I cherish the biblical principle that genuine faith must be freely chosen and can never be produced through governmental pressure or legislation. True religion appeals to the conscience; it is not enforced by civil authority.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to continue defending the constitutional separation of church and state, to support policies that preserve freedom of conscience for all Americans, and to oppose efforts that blur the proper boundaries between religious institutions and governmental power, including efforts to weaken the Johnson Amendment.

Thank you for your continued commitment to protecting one of our nation's most precious freedoms—the freedom to worship, or not worship, according to the dictates of conscience.

Respectfully,

Lanny Swarts

From: "Clavis V.M.C." <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Victor M. Caballero
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 18:42:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a Seventh-day Adventist to express my profound concern regarding the draft report's recommendations to fund religious activities with public dollars and to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

My faith denomination carries a long memory on this subject. For well over a century, Adventists have warned against entangling church and state—not out of indifference to religion's role in public life, but from a historical awareness of what happens when churches look to the government for money or favor rather than to God alone. State patronage corrupts far faster than it strengthens. Funding conditions inevitably become doctrinal conditions, and political access quickly devolves into political dependence. A church that depends on Washington to balance its budget will always struggle to speak prophetically to Washington when conscience requires it.

The draft report frames the separation of church and state as a modern, secular invention. Historically, that is inaccurate. The concept traces back directly to Roger Williams in the 1640s, who argued for a "wall of separation" specifically to protect the "garden of the church" from the "wilderness of the world." Williams sought to protect faith from state control, not to weaken it. Rhode Island's example influenced Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware to follow suit well before independence. By the time the Constitution was drafted, the Framers had largely concluded that religion flourished best when free from government entanglement. It was not a view unique to Thomas Jefferson; James Madison explicitly wrote that religion prospers without government patronage. Furthermore, Presidents Millard Fillmore, Ulysses S. Grant, James A. Garfield, and Theodore Roosevelt each stated plainly that church and state must remain separate. This is not a recent or peripheral concept—it is a consistent, foundational thread running through American leadership.

The Johnson Amendment deserves particular attention. It does not prevent a church from addressing moral issues or guiding its members' ethical convictions; it simply stops houses of worship from being used as vehicles for partisan political campaigning. Repealing it would subject pastors to immense pressure to deliver blocks of votes, while allowing wealthy special interests to use congregations as political tools. Combined with new government funding streams, this creates an acute risk of systemic corruption within religious institutions. I urge the Commission to recommend that the Johnson Amendment remain intact and be fully enforced.

Finally, the Commission's own conduct during its February hearing on antisemitism is highly instructive. When a commissioner's religious line of questioning became inconvenient, she was removed from the panel. If a body that calls for expanding religious expression in government cannot tolerate a dissenting voice within its own ranks, it demonstrates precisely why church and state must remain at arm's length. Once government and religion are joined, the state inevitably ends up deciding whose religious expression is acceptable and whose is not.

I ask the Commission to reconsider these recommendations. The separation of church and state was not built to weaken religion in America—it was established by people of faith to keep religion free, and it has done exactly that for nearly 250 years.

Sincerely,

Victor M. Caballero
Simi Valley, Caliy

From: "Casey,Kathleen" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 18:42:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am a seventh day Adventist. I am abundantly grateful to live in a country that allows individual freedom of conscience. Please uphold "Congress shall make No laws respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise there of... Any law regarding any aspect of religion would be a violation ?

Please continue to protect individual liberty of conscience as the founding fathers of our great nation intended.

Sincerely, Kathy Casey

[ADVENTISTHEALTH:INTERNAL]

From: "Clavis V.M.C." <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State - Victor M. Caballero
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 18:48:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a Seventh-day Adventist to express my profound concern regarding the draft report's recommendations to fund religious activities with public dollars and to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

My faith denomination carries a long memory on this subject. For well over a century, Adventists have warned against entangling church and state—not out of indifference to religion's role in public life, but from a historical awareness of what happens when churches look to the government for money or favor rather than to God alone. State patronage corrupts far faster than it strengthens. Funding conditions inevitably become doctrinal conditions, and political access quickly devolves into political dependence. A church that depends on Washington to balance its budget will always struggle to speak prophetically to Washington when conscience requires it.

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The Johnson Amendment deserves particular attention. It does not prevent a church from addressing moral issues or guiding its members' ethical convictions; it simply stops houses of worship from being used as vehicles for partisan political campaigning. Repealing it would subject pastors to immense pressure to deliver blocks of votes, while allowing wealthy special interests to use congregations as political tools. Combined with new government funding streams, this creates an acute risk of systemic corruption within religious institutions. I urge the Commission to recommend that the Johnson Amendment remain intact and be fully enforced.

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I ask the Commission to reconsider these recommendations. The separation of church and state was not built to weaken religion in America—it was established by people of faith to keep religion free, and it has done exactly that for nearly 250 years.

Sincerely,

Victor M. Caballero
Simi Valley, California

DOJ-RLC Comment-019558

From: holly joers <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] There is a Wall!
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 18:48:48 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: National_Sunday_Law_by_A_T_Jones.pdf

Dear Religious Liberty Commission:

I appreciate your review of current religious and secular climates in America, and your discussion on the role of religion and government. However, I disagree with your finding that there is “no wall of separation” between religion and government in our country. Instead, I agree with the appraisal and response of Pillar of Freedom, clarifying the historical separation of religion from government in United States history, especially in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania…and echoed by inference in our U.S. Constitution with its First Amendment “establishment” and “free exercise” clauses. I believe there is definitely a solid wall of separation between religion and government intended by our founding fathers.

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.

America was a necessary refuge for those fleeing persecution such as arises from strong religious influence and force exercised by governments which *had* a bridge (“Pontifex” = Pope) connecting religion with government, and seeking to usurp personal religious freedom and the free exercise of personal conscience in responding to the Holy Spirit’s conviction upon the heart as they interacted with God’s word in Holy Scripture.

My parents raised me to appreciate God’s word and to follow it. They took me to church and sent me to private religious schools. However, it was my choice to be baptized when I was old enough to *decide for myself*, at age 11. It was my choice to remain in the faith of my parents. It was my decision to marry within my faith, my decision to study Scripture for myself until such study consumed my interest and supplied additional Bible-based convictions besides what my parents had taught me. My other two siblings were also taken to church and sent to parochial school, yet they made different choices and my parents likewise respected those, knowing that just as in marriage, a forced “shotgun wedding” is of little value and typically not lasting.

If America values truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, we don’t need to muddy personal conviction. We must not cause Americans to *live a lie* by employing any “bridge” of religious influence that may cause a hypocritical “conversion” and practice of religion for the sake of avoiding inconvenience/persecution/income loss…and any other selfish reason apart from a true heart experience with a personal God.

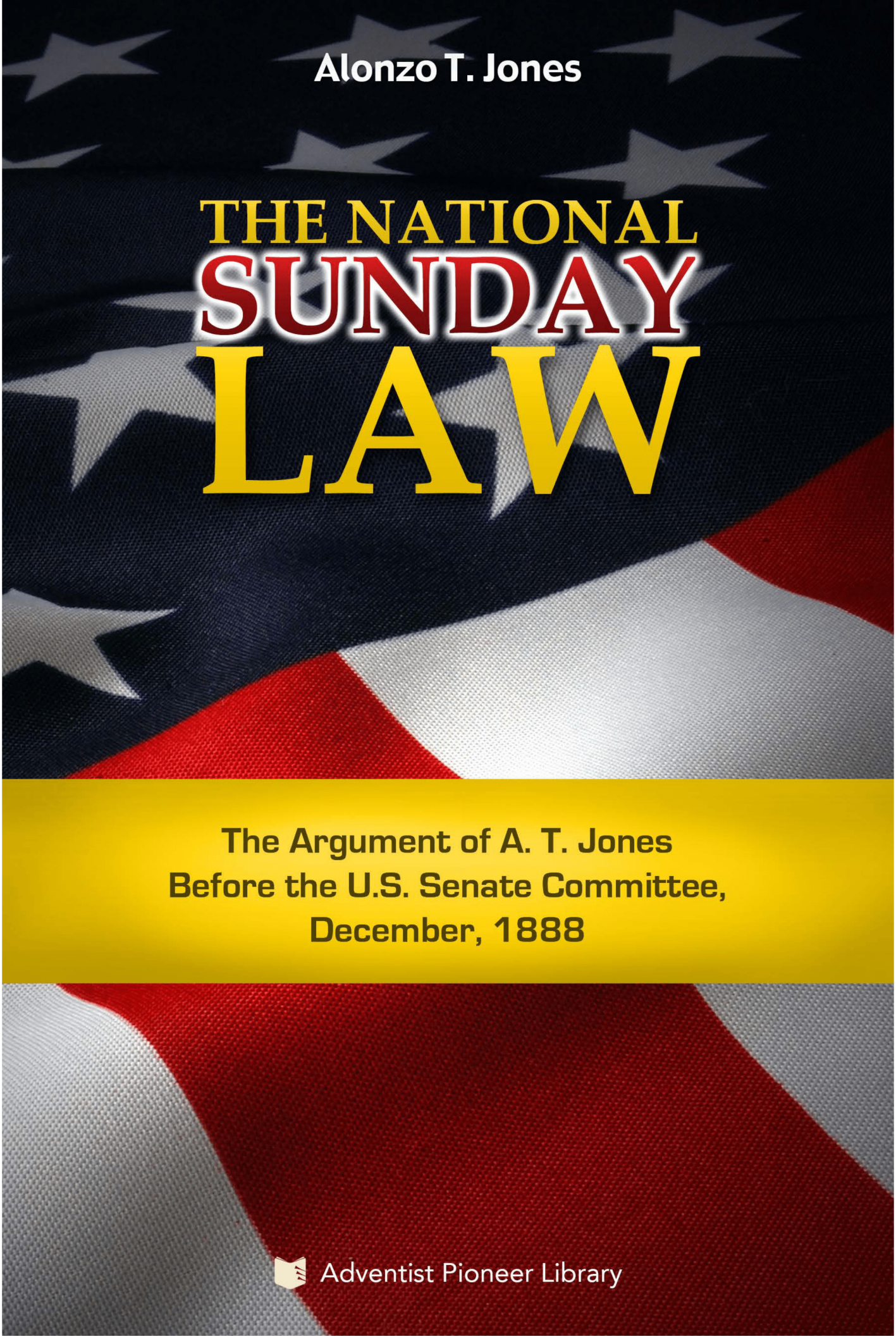
Any religion so weak that it needs the help of government to draw “converts” across such bridges and increase church attendance had better review European and American history again, in minute detail. History has proven that the papal and Protestant “bridges” of the past, religion united with and ultimately empowered by government, led to millions of untimely deaths in those refusing to travel on such bridges. These martyrs preferred to keep personal heart matters, convictions and religious decisions private while exercising the innate religious freedom provided to all at birth by our loving Creator, who knows that true love cannot be forced.

Joshua 24:15 summarizes God's true voice to America and the world today, "And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Bible history is clear: The freedom to choose to rebel against God's government evicted Lucifer from Heaven, evicted Adam and Eve from Eden, and led to Israel's captivity in Babylon, etc. God's love would draw all hearts as Jesus, crucified willingly for our sins, is uplifted before men (John 12:32). Religion has nothing to do with that. Nothing at all. Not the first hint of a bridge. For further study, you might enjoy the book I recently read, A.T. Jones' *National Sunday Law*, presented before Congress in 1888 when similar issues were considered. He gives dozens of reasons for your commission today to pause for thought and further study.

Sincerely, prayerfully,

Holly Joers



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Alonzo T. Jones

THE NATIONAL SUNDAY LAW

The Argument of A. T. Jones Before the U.S. Senate Committee, December, 1888

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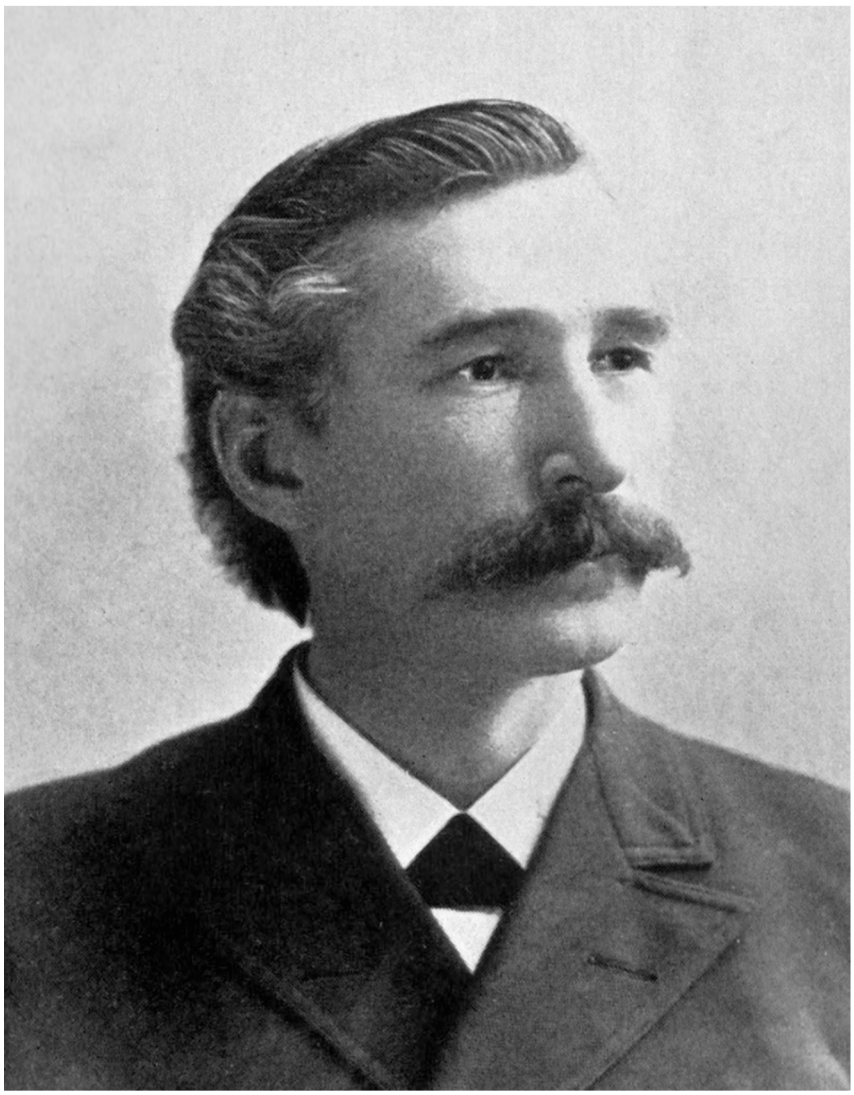

Alonzo Trevier Jones (1850-1923)

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Introduction

THIS pamphlet is a report of an argument made upon the national Sunday bill introduced by Senator Blair in the fiftieth Congress. It is not, however, exactly the argument that was made before the Senate Committee, as there were so many interruptions in the course of my speech that it was impossible to make a connected argument upon a single point. By these questions, etc., my argument was not only forced to take a wider range than was intended when I began to speak, but I was prevented from making the definite argument that I designed to present. I do not speak of these interruptions and counter-arguments by way of complaint, but only to explain why this pamphlet is issued. Nevertheless it is a fact that while there were eighteen speeches before mine, occupying three hours, in all of which together there were only one hundred and eighty-nine questions and counter-arguments by all the members of the Committee who were present, I was interrupted by the Chairman alone, *one hundred and sixty-nine times* in *ninety* minutes, as may be seen by the official report of the hearing.—*Fiftieth Congress, Second Session, Messages and Documents No. 43*, pp. 73-102.

A national Sunday law is a question of national interest. While it is true that the Sunday-rest bill did not become a law, the legislation having died with the expiration of the fiftieth Congress, it is also true that those who worked for the introduction and passage of that bill are now laying plans to have another national [4] Sunday bill introduced as soon as possible in the fifty-first Congress, and will do all in their power to secure its enactment into law. The scope that was given to the subject by the questions asked of me by the Senate Committee, has opened the way for a somewhat exhaustive treatment of the subject. These questions being raised by United States senators,—men of national affairs,—show that a wider circulation of this matter is not out of place. The subject is worthy of the careful attention of the whole American people. The principles of the American Constitution, the proper relationship between religion and the State, the distinction between moral and civil law, the inalienable civil and

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religious rights of men,—these are questions that never should become secondary in the mind of any American citizen.

An eminent American jurist has justly observed that in a government of the people "there is no safety except in an enlightened public opinion, based on individual intelligence." Constitutional provisions against the encroachments of the religious upon the civil power are safeguards only so long as the intelligence of the people shall recognize the truth that no man can allow any legislation in behalf of the religion, or the religious observances, in which he himself believes, without forfeiting his own religious freedom.

In enlarging as I have upon the matter presented in the original hearing, the meaning or intention of any statement has not been changed in the slightest degree. The argument is submitted to the American people with the earnest hope that they will give thoughtful consideration to the principles involved. The positions taken will bear the severest test of every form of just criticism. [5]

The bill proposed by Senator Blair, and upon which the argument was made, is as follows:—

> 50th CONGRESS, S. 2983. 1st SESSION.
>
> IN the Senate of the United States, May 21, 1888, Mr. Blair introduced the following bill, which was read twice, and referred to the Committee on Education and Labor:—
>
> A bill to secure to the people the enjoyment of the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord's day, as a day of rest, and to promote its observance as a day of religious worship.
>
> Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That no person, or corporation, or the agent, servant, or employee of any person or corporation, shall perform or authorize to be performed any secular work, labor, or business to the disturbance of others, works of necessity, mercy, and humanity excepted; nor shall any person engage in any play, game, or amusement, or recreation, to the disturbance of others, on the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord's day, or during any part thereof, in any territory, district, vessel, or place subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States; nor shall it be lawful for any person or corporation to receive pay for labor or service performed or rendered in violation of this section.

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SEC. 2. That no mails or mail matter shall hereafter be transported in time of peace over any land postal route, nor shall any mail matter be collected, assorted, handled, or delivered during any part of the first day of the week: *Provided,* That whenever any letter shall relate to a work of necessity or mercy, or shall concern the health, life, or decease of any person, and the fact shall be plainly stated upon the face of the envelope containing the same, the postmaster-general shall provide for the transportation of such letter.

SEC. 3. That the prosecution of commerce between the States and with the Indian tribes, the same not [6] being work of necessity, mercy, or humanity, by the transportation of persons or property by land or water in such way as to interfere with or disturb the people in the enjoyment of the first day of the week, or any portion thereof, as a day of rest from labor, the same not being labor of necessity, mercy, or humanity, or its observance as a day of religious worship, is hereby prohibited; and any person or corporation, or the agent or employee of any person or corporation, who shall willfully violate this section, shall be punished by a fine of not less than ten nor more than one thousand dollars, and no service performed in the prosecution of such prohibited commerce shall be lawful, nor shall any compensation be recoverable or be paid for the same.

SEC. 4. That all military and naval drills, musters, and parades, not in time of active service or immediate preparation therefor, of soldiers, sailors, marines, or cadets of the United States, on the first day of the week, except assemblies for the due and orderly observance of religious worship, are hereby prohibited, nor shall any unnecessary labor be performed or permitted in the military or naval service of the United States on the Lord's day.

SEC. 5. That it shall be unlawful to pay or to receive payment or wages in any manner for service rendered, or for labor performed, or for the transportation of persons or of property in violation of the provisions of this act, nor shall any action lie for the recovery thereof, and when so paid, whether in advance or otherwise, the same may be recovered back by whoever shall first sue for the same.

SEC. 6. That labor or service performed and rendered on the first day of the week in consequence of accident, disaster, or unavoidable delays in making the regular connections upon postal routes and routes of travel and transportation, the preservation of perishable and exposed property, and the regular and necessary transportation and delivery of articles of food in condition for healthy use, and

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> such transportation for short distances from one State, district, or Territory, [7] into another State, district, or Territory as by local laws shall be declared to be necessary for the public good, shall not be deemed violations of this act, but the same shall be construed, so far as possible, to secure to the whole people rest from toil during the first day of the week, their mental and moral culture, and the religious observance of the Sabbath day.

Rev. A. H. Lewis, D. D., representative of the Seventh-day Baptists, had spoken, and asked that a section be added to the bill granting exemption to observers of the Seventh day; but in answering the questions that were asked by the Chairman, Mr. Lewis compromised his position, and was followed soon after by Dr. Herrick Johnson, of Chicago, who remarked that Dr. Lewis had "given his whole case away." This is what is referred to in my introductory remarks to the effect that we did not intend to "give *our* case away."

A. T. J. [8]

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Argument of Alonzo T. Jones Before the Senate Committee, Washington, D. C

Senator Blair.—There are gentlemen present who wish to be heard in opposition to the bill. Prof. Alonzo T. Jones, of Battle Creek College, Mich., is one of those who have spoken to me in regard to it. Will you not state, Prof. Jones, what your desire is? I have no doubt that we can obtain leave of the Senate to sit during its session to-day. It is exceedingly desirable to go on with this hearing, and complete it now. How would such an arrangement comport with your convenience? First, state, please, whom you represent, and your reasons for desiring to be heard.

Mr. Jones.—Mr. Chairman, I represent the people known as Seventh-day Adventists. It is true, we have been entirely ignored by the other side. The very small "*sect*," as they stated it, of Seventh-day Baptists has been recognized, but we are more than three times their number, and many times their power in the real force of our work. We have organizations in every State and Territory in the Union. We have the largest printing-house in Michigan; the largest printing-house on the Pacific Coast; the largest Sanitarium in the world; a college in California and one in Michigan; an academy in Massachusetts; a printing establishment in Basel, Switzerland; one in Christiana, [10] Norway; and one in Melbourne, Australia. Our mission work has enlarged until, besides embracing the greater part of Europe, it has also extended nearly around the world; and we desire a hearing, with the consent of the Committee.

Senator Blair.—Where do you reside?

Mr. Jones.—At present in Michigan. My home for the past four years has been in California. I am now teaching history in Battle Creek College, Mich.

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I must say in justice to myself, and also in behalf of the body which I represent, that we dissent almost wholly, I might say, wholly, from the position taken by the representative of the Seventh-day Baptists. I knew, the instant that Dr. Lewis stated what he did here, that he had "given his case away." We have not given our case away, Senators, nor do we expect to give it away. We expect to go deeper than any have gone at this hearing, both upon the principles and upon the facts, as well as upon the logic of the facts.

Senator Blair.—This matter is all familiar to you. You are a professor of history. Can you not go on this afternoon?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, if I can have a little space between now and this afternoon to get my papers together. I have some references to read that I did not bring with me this morning.

Senator Blair.—Very well.

ARGUMENT

Senator Blair.—You have a full hour, Professor. It is now half past one.

Mr. Jones.—There are three particular lines in which I wish to conduct the argument: First, the [11] principles upon which we stand; second, the historical view; and, third, the practical aspect of the question.

The principle upon which we stand is that civil government is civil, and has nothing to do in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way. The basis of this is found in the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 22:21. When the Pharisees asked whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not, he replied: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

In this the Saviour certainly separated that which pertains to Caesar from that which pertains to God. We are not to render to Caesar that which pertains to God; we are not to render to God by Caesar that which is God's.

Senator Blair.—May not the thing due to Caesar be due to God also?

Mr. Jones.—No, sir. If that be so, then the Saviour did entangle himself in his talk, the very thing which they wanted him to do. The record

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says that they sought "how they might entangle him in his talk." Having drawn the distinction which he has, between that which belongs to Caesar and that which belongs to God, if it be true that the same things belong to both, then he did entangle himself in his talk; and where is the force in his words which command us to render to Caesar that which belongs to Caesar, and to God the things that are God's?

Senator Blair.—Is it not a requirement of God's that we render to Caesar that which is due to Caesar?

Mr. Jones.—Yes.

Senator Blair.—If Caesar is *society,* and the Sabbath is required for the good of society, does not God require [12] us to establish the Sabbath for the good of society? and if society makes a law accordingly, is it not binding?

Mr. Jones.—It is for the good of society that men shall be Christians; but it is not in the province of the State to make Christians. For the State to undertake to do so would not be for the benefit of society; it never has been, and it never can be.

Senator Blair.—Do you not confuse this matter? A thing may be required for the good of society, and for that very reason be in accordance with the will and the command of God. God issues his commands for the good of society, does he not? God does not give us commands that have no relation to the good of society.

Mr. Jones.—His commands are for the good of man.

Senator Blair.—Man is society. It is made up of individual men.

Mr. Jones.—But in that which God has issued to man for the good of men he has given those things which pertain solely to man's relationship to his God; and he has also given things which pertain to man's relationship to his fellow-men. With those things in which our duty pertains to our fellow-men, civil government can have something to do.

Senator Blair.—Man would obey God in obeying civil society.

Mr. Jones.—I will come to that point. In the things which pertain to our duty to God, with the individual's right of serving God as one's conscience dictates, society has nothing to do; but in the formation of civil

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society, there are certain rights surrendered to the society by the individual, without which society could not be organized. [13]

Senator Blair.—That is not conceded. When was this doctrine of a compact in society made? It is the philosophy of an infidel.

Mr. Jones.—It is made wherever you find men together.

Senator Blair.—Did you and I ever agree to it? Did it bind us before we were *compos mentis?*

Mr. Jones.—Certainly. Civil government is an ordinance of God.

Senator Blair.—Then it is not necessarily an agreement of man?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir, it springs from the people.

Senator Blair.—As to the compact in society that is talked about, it is not conceded that it is a matter of personal and individual agreement. Society exists altogether independent of the volition of those who enter into it. However, I shall not interrupt you further. I only did this because of our private conversation, in which I thought you labored under a fallacy in your fundamental proposition, that would lead all the way through your argument. I suggested that ground, and that is all.

Mr. Jones.—I think the statement of the Declaration of Independence is true, that "Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Senator Blair.—I do not controvert that.

Mr. Jones.—Of all men in the world, Americans ought to be the last to deny the social compact theory of civil government. On board the "Mayflower," before the Pilgrim Fathers ever set foot on these shores, the following was written:—

> In the name of God, Amen. We, whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign, [14] Lord King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, king, defender of the faith, etc., having undertaken for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and the honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia; *do by these presents, solemnly and mutually,* in the presence of God

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> and one another, *covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politick,* for our better ordering and preservation, and furtherance of the ends aforesaid: and by virtue hereof do enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and officers, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape Cod, the eleventh of November, in the reign of our sovereign, Lord King James, of England, France, and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland, the fifty-fourth, Anno Domini, 1620.

The next American record is that of the fundamental orders of Connecticut, 1638-39, and reads as follows:—

> Forasmuch as it hath pleased the Allmighty God by the wise disposition of his diuyne pruidence so to order and dispose of things that we, the inhabitants and residents of Windsor, and Harteford, and Wethersfield, are now cohabiting and dwelling in and vppon the river of Conectecotte and the lands thereunto adioyneing; and well knowing where a people are gathered together the word of God requires that to mayntayne the peace and vnion of such a people there should be an orderly and decent gourment established acording to God, to order and dispose of the affayres of the people at all seasons, as occation shall require; *doe therefore assotiate and conioyne ourselues to be as one publike State or commonwelth;* and doe *for ourselues and our successors and such as shall adioyned to vs att any tyme hereafter, enter into combination and confederation together*, etc. [15]

And, sir, the first Constitution of your own State—1784—in its bill of rights, declares:—

> I. All men are born equally free and independent; therefore, all government of right originates from the people, *is founded in consent,* and instituted for the general good.
>
> III. When men enter into a state of society, they surrender some of their natural rights to that society, in order to insure the protection of others; and without such an equivalent, the surrender is void.
>
> IV. Among the natural rights, some are in their very nature unalienable, because no equivalent can be received for them. Of this kind are the rights of conscience.

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And in Part 2, of that some Constitution, under the division of the "form of government," are these words:—

> The people inhabiting the territory formerly called the province of New Hampshire, do *hereby solemnly and mutually agree with each other* to form themselves into a free, sovereign, and independent body politic, or State, by the name of the State of New Hampshire.

In the Constitution of New Hampshire of 1792, these articles are repeated word for word. They remain there without alteration in a single letter under the ratification of 1852, and also under the ratification of 1877. Consequently, sir, the very State which sends you to this capitol is founded upon the very theory which you here deny. This is the doctrine of the Declaration of Independence; it is the doctrine of the Scripture; and therefore we hold it to be eternally true.

These sound and genuine American principles—civil governments deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, and the inalienability of the [16] rights of conscience,—these are the principles asserted and maintained by Seventh-day Adventists.

Senator Blair.—But society is behind the government which society creates.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly. All civil government springs from the people, I care not in what form it is.

Senator Blair.—That is all agreed to.

Mr. Jones.—But the people, I care not how many there are, have no right to invade your relationship to God, nor mine. That rests between the individual and God, through faith in Jesus Christ; and as the Saviour has made this distinction between that which pertains to Caesar and that which is God's, when Caesar exacts of men that which pertains to God, then Caesar is out of his place, and in so far as Caesar is obeyed there, God is denied. When Caesar—civil government—exacts of men that which is God's, he demands what does not belong to him; in so doing Caesar usurps the place and the prerogative of God, and every man who regards God or his own rights before God, will disregard all such interference on the part of Caesar.

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This argument is confirmed by the apostle's commentary upon Christ's words. In Romans 13:1-9, is written:—

> Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye [17] must needs be subject not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

It is easy to see that this scripture is but an exposition of Christ's words, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." In the Saviour's command to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, there is plainly a recognition of the rightfulness of civil government, and that civil government has claims upon us which we are in duty bound to recognize, and that there are things which duty requires us to render to the civil government. This scripture in Romans 13 simply states the same thing in other words: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."

Again: the Saviour's words were in answer to a question concerning tribute. They said to him, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" Romans 13:6 refers to the same thing, saying, "For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing." In answer to the question of the Pharisees about the tribute, Christ said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's."

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Romans 13:7, taking up the same thought, says, "Render therefore to all their dues: [18] tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor." These references make positive that which we have stated,—that this portion of Scripture (Romans 13:1-9) is a divine commentary upon the words of Christ in Matthew 22:17-21.

The passage refers first to civil government, the higher powers,—the powers that be. Next it speaks of rulers, as bearing the sword and attending upon matters of tribute. Then it commands to render tribute to whom tribute is due, and says, "Owe no man any thing; but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law." Then he refers to the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments, and says, "It there by any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

There are other commandments of this same law to which Paul refers. There are the four commandments of the first table of the law,—the commandments which say, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me;" "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or nay likeness of any thing;" "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;" "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Then there is the other commandment in which are briefly comprehended all these, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

Paul knew full well these commandments. Why, then, did he say, "If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"?—Because he was writing concerning the principles set forth by the Saviour, which relate to our duties to civil government. [19]

Our duties under civil government pertain solely to the government and to our fellow-men, because the powers of civil government pertain solely to men in their relations one to another, and to the government. But the Saviour's words in the same connection entirely separated that which pertains to God from that which pertains to civil government. The things which pertain to God are not to be rendered to civil government—to the

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powers that be; therefore Paul, although knowing full well that there were other commandments, said, "If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" that is, if there be any other commandment which comes into the relation between man and civil government, it is comprehended in this saying, that he shall love his neighbor as himself; thus showing conclusively that the powers that be, though ordained of God, are so ordained simply in things pertaining to the relation of man with his fellow-men, and in those things alone.

Further: as in this divine record of the duties that men over to the powers that be, there is no reference whatever to the first table of the law, it therefore follows that the powers that be, although ordained of God, have nothing whatever to do with the relations which men bear toward God.

As the ten commandments contain the whole duty of man, and as in the enumeration here given of the duties that men owe to the powers that be, there is no mention of any of the things contained in the first table of the law, it follows that none of the duties enjoined in the first table of the law of God, do men owe to the powers that be; that is to say, again, that the powers that be, although ordained of God, are not ordained of God in anything pertaining to a single duty [20] enjoined in any one of the first four of the ten commandments. These are duties that men owe to God, and with those the powers that be can of right have nothing to do, because Christ has commanded to render unto God—not to Caesar, nor by Caesar—that which is God's. Therefore, as in his comment upon the principle which Christ established, Paul has left out of the account the first four commandments, so we deny, forever, the right of any civil government to legislate in anything that pertains to men's duty to God under the first four commandments. This Sunday bill does propose to legislate in regard to the Lord's day. If it is the Lord's day, we are to render it to the Lord, not to Caesar. When Caesar exacts it of us, he is exacting what does not belong to him, and is demanding of us that with which he should have nothing to do.

Senator Blair.—Would it answer your objection in that regard, if, instead of saying "the Lord's day", we should say, "Sunday"?

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Mr. Jones.—No, sir, Because the underlying principle, the sole basis, of Sunday, is ecclesiastical, and legislation in regard to it is ecclesiastical legislation. I shall come more fully to the question you ask, presently.

Now do not misunderstand us on this point. We are Seventh-day Adventists; but if this bill were in favor of enforcing the observance of the seventh day as the Lord's day, we would oppose it just as much as we oppose it as it is now, for the reason that civil government has nothing to do with *what* we owe to God, or whether we *owe* anything or not, or whether we *pay* it or not.

Allow me again to refer to the words of Christ to emphasize this point. At that time the question was [21] upon the subject of tribute, whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not. In answering the question, Christ established this principle: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." That tribute money was Caesar's; it bore his image and superscription; it was to be rendered to him. *Now,* it is a question of rendering Sabbath observance, and it is a perfectly legitimate and indeed a necessary question to ask right here: Is it lawful to render Lord's day observance to Caesar? The reply may be in His own words: Show me the Lord's day; whose image and superscription does it bear?—The Lord's, to be sure. This very bill which is under discussion here to-day declares it to be the Lord's day. Then the words of Christ apply to this. Bearing the image and superscription of the Lord, Render therefore to the Lord the things that are the Lord's, and to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. It does not bear the image and superscription of Caesar; it does not belong to him; it is not to be rendered to him.

Again: take the institution under the word *Sabbath:* Is it lawful to render Sabbath observance to Caesar or not? Show us the Sabbath; whose image and superscription does it bear? The commandment of God says, it "is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." It bears his image and superscription, and his only; it belongs wholly to him; Caesar can have nothing to do with it. It does not belong to Caesar; its observance cannot be rendered to Caesar, but only to God; for the commandment is, "Remember the Sabbath day, *to keep it holy.*" If it is not kept holy, it is not kept at all. Therefore, belonging to God, bearing his superscription, and not that

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of Caesar, according to Christ's commandment, [22] it is to be rendered only to God; because we are to render to God that which is God's, and the Sabbath is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. Sabbath observance, therefore, or Lord's day observance, whichever you may choose to call it, never can be rendered to Caesar. And Caesar never can demand it without demanding that which belongs to God, or without putting himself in the place of God, and usurping the prerogative of God.

Therefore, we say that if this bill were framed in behalf of the real Sabbath of the Lord, the seventh day, the day which we observe; if this bill proposed to promote its observance, or to compel men to do no work upon that day we would oppose it just as strongly as we oppose it now, and I would stand here at this table and argue precisely as I am arguing against this, and upon the same principle,—the principle established by Jesus Christ,—that with that which is God's the civil government never can of right have anything to do. That duty rests solely between man and God; and if any man does not render it to God, he is responsible only to God, and not to any man, nor to any assembly or organization of men, for his failure or refusal to render it to God; and any power that undertakes to punish that man for his failure or refusal to render to God what is God's, puts itself in the place of God. Any government which attempts it, sets itself against the word of Christ, and is therefore antichristian. This Sunday bill proposes to have this Government do just that thing, and therefore I say, without any reflection upon the author of the bill, this national Sunday bill which is under discussion here to-day is *antichristian.* But in saying this I am not singling out this contemplated law as worse than all other Sunday [23] laws in the world. There never was a Sunday law that was not antichristian. And there never can be one that will not be antichristian.

Senator Blair.—You oppose all the Sunday laws of the country, then?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir.

Senator Blair.—You are against all Sunday laws?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir; we are against every Sunday law that was ever made in this world, from the first enacted by Constantine to this one

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now proposed; and we would be equally against a Sabbath law if it were proposed, for that would be antichristian, too.

Senator Blair.—State and national, alike?

Mr. Jones.—State and national, sir. I shall give you historical reasons presently, and the facts upon which these things stand, and I hope they will receive consideration.

George Washington, I believe, is yet held in some respectful consideration—he is by the Seventh-day Adventists at least—and he said, "Every man who conducts himself as a good citizen is accountable alone to God for his religious faith, and is to be protected in worshiping God according to the dictates of his own conscience." And so should we be protected, so long as we are law-abiding citizens. There are no saloon keepers among us. We are as a body for prohibition; and as for the principles of Christian temperance, we conscientiously practice them. In short, you will find no people in this country or in the world, more peaceable and law-abiding than we endeavor to be. We teach the people according to the Scripture, to be subject to the powers that be; we teach them that the highest duty of the Christian *citizen* is strictly to obey the law,—to obey it not from fear of punishment, but out of respect [24] for governmental authority, and out of respect for God, and conscience towards him.

Senator Blair.—That is the common Mormon argument. The Mormons say their institution is a matter of religious belief. Everybody concedes their right to believe in Mormonism, but when they come to the point of practicing it, will it not be to the disturbance of others?

Mr. Jones.—I should have come to that, even though you had not asked the question. But as you have introduced it, I will notice it now. My argument throughout is that the civil government can never have anything to do with men's duties under the first four of the ten commandments; and this is the argument embodied in Washington's words. These duties pertain solely to God. Now polygamy is adultery. But adultery is not a duty that men owe to God, in any way, much less does it come under any of the first four commandments. This comes within the inhibitions of the second table of the law of God—the commandments embracing duty to

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our neighbor. How men should conduct themselves toward their fellow-men, civil government must decide; that is the very purpose of its existence. Consequently, the practice of polygamy lying wholly within this realm, is properly subject to the jurisdiction of civil government. My argument does not in the least degree countenance the principles of Mormonism, nor can it fairly be made to do so. I know that it is offered as a very ready objection; but those who offer it as an objection and as an argument against the principles upon which we stand, thereby make adultery a religious practice. But against all such objection and argument, I maintain that adultery is not in any sense a religious practice. It is not only highly irreligious, [25] but it is essentially *uncivil;* and because it is uncivil, the civil power has as much right to blot it out as it has to punish murder, or thieving, or perjury, or any other uncivil thing. Moreover, we deny that honest occupations on any day of the week, or at any time whatever, can ever properly be classed with adultery.

There are also people who believe in community of property in this world. Suppose they base their principles of having all things in common upon the apostolic example. Very good. They have the right to do that. Every one who sells his property and puts it into a common fund, has a right to do that if he chooses; but suppose these men in carrying out that principle, and in claiming that it is a religious ordinance, were to take without consent your property or mine into their community. Then what?—The State forbids it. It does not forbid the exercise of their religion; but it protects your property and mine, and in exercising its prerogative of protection, it forbids theft. And in forbidding theft, the State never asks any questions as to whether thieving is a religious practice. So also as to polygamy, which is practiced among the Mormons. But let us consider this in another view.

It is every man's right in this country, or anywhere else, to worship an idol if he chooses. That idol embodies his conviction of what God is. He can worship only according to his convictions. It matters not what form his idol may have, he has the right to worship it anywhere in all the world, therefore in the United States. But suppose that in the worship of that god he attempts to take the life of one of his fellow-men, and offer it as a human sacrifice. The civil government exists for the protection of life, liberty, property, etc., and it must punish that man for his attempt upon

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the life of [26] his fellow-man. The civil law protects man's life from such exercise of any one's religion, but in punishing the offender, the State does not consider the question of his religion at all. It would punish him just the same if he made no pretensions to worship or to religion. It punishes him for his incivility, for his attempt at murder, not for his irreligion. I repeat, the question of religion is not considered by the State; the sole question is, Did he threaten the life of his fellow-man? Civil government must protect its citizens. This is strictly within Caesar's jurisdiction; it comes within the line of duties which the Scripture shows to pertain to our neighbor, and with it Caesar has to do.

Therefore it is true that the State can never of right legislate in regard to any man's religious faith, or in relation to anything in the first four commandments of the decalogue. But if in the exercise of his religious convictions under the first four commandments, a man invades the rights of his neighbor, as to life, family, property, or character, then the civil government says that it is unlawful. Why? Because it is irreligious or immoral?—Not at all; but because it is uncivil, and for that reason only. It never can be proper for the State to ask any question as to whether any man is religious or not, or whether his actions are religious or not. The sole question must ever be, Is the action civil or uncivil.

Senator Blair.—Now apply that right to this case—to the institution of the Sabbath among men for the good of men.

Mr. Jones.—Very good, we will consider that. Here are persons who are keeping Sunday. It is their right to work on every other day of the week. It is their right to work on *that* day, if they desire; but they [27] are keeping that day, recognizing it as the Sabbath. Now while they are doing that which is their right, here are other people who are keeping Saturday, and others who are keeping Friday. The Mohammedans recognize Friday. But we will confine ourselves to those who keep Saturday, the seventh day, as the Sabbath. Those who keep Sunday, and who want legislation for that day, ask that other people shall be forbidden to work on Sunday, because they say it disturbs their rest, it disturbs their worship, etc.; and they claim that their rights are not properly protected. Do they really believe that in principle? Let us see. They will never admit (at any rate, I have never yet

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found one of them who would) that their work on Saturday disturbs the rest, or the worship, of the man who rests on Saturday. If their work on Saturday does not disturb the Sabbath rest, or the worship, of the man who keeps Saturday, then upon what principle is it that our work on Sunday disturbs the rest of those who keep Sunday? I have never found one on that side yet who would admit the principle. If their work does not disturb our rest and our worship, our work *cannot* disturb their rest or their worship. More than this: In a general Sunday convention held in San Francisco, at which I was present, there was a person who spoke on this very question. Said he: "There are some people, and a good many of them in this State, who do not believe in Sunday laws, and who keep Saturday as the Sabbath; but," said he, "the majority must rule. The vast majority of the people do keep Sunday; their rights must be respected, and they have a right to enact it into law." I arose and said, "Suppose the Seventh-day people were in the majority, and they should go to the legislature and ask for a law to compel you to keep [28] Saturday out of respect to their rights. Would you consider it right?" There was a murmur all over the house, "No."

Senator Blair.—Upon what ground did they say, No?

Mr. Jones.—That is what I should like to know. They were not logical. Their answer shows that there is no ground in justice nor in right for their claim that the majority should rule in matters of conscience.

Senator Blair.—That does not follow. At least it does not strike me that it follows. The majority has a right to rule in what pertains to the regulation of society, and if Caesar regulates society, then the majority has a right in this country to say what we shall render to Caesar.

Mr. Jones.—Very good, but the majority has no right to say what we shall render *to God;* nor has it any right to say that we shall render *to Caesar* that which is *God's.* If nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every one thousand people in the United States kept the seventh day, that is, Saturday, and I deemed it my right, and made it my choice, to keep Sunday, they would have not right to compel me to rest on Saturday.

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Senator Blair.—In other words, you take the ground that for the good of society, irrespective of the religious aspect of the question, society may not require abstinence from labor on Sabbath, if it disturbs others?

Mr. Jones.—As to its disturbing others, I have proved that it does not. The body of your question states my position exactly.

Senator Blair.—You are logical all the way through that there shall be no Sabbath. This question was passed me to ask: "Is the speaker also opposed to all laws against blasphemy?" [29]

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir. But not because blasphemy is not wrong, but because civil government cannot define blasphemy, nor punish it. Blasphemy pertains to God, it is an offense against him, it is a sin against him.

Senator Blair.—Suppose the practice of it in society at large is hurtful to society?

Mr. Jones.—That will have to be explained. How is it hurtful to society?

Senator Blair.—Suppose it be hurtful to society in this way: A belief in the existence of God, and reverence for the Creator, and a cultivation of that sentiment in society, is for the good of society; is, in fact, the basis of all law and restraint. If the Almighty, who knows everything, or is supposed to, and has all power, has no right to restrain us, it is difficult to see how we can restrain each other.

Mr. Jones.—He has the right to restrain us. He does restrain us.

Senator Blair.—To commonly blaspheme and deride and ridicule the Almighty, would, of course, have a tendency to bring up the children who are soon to be the State, in an absolute disregard of him and his authority. Blasphemy, as I understand it, is that practice which brings the Creator into contempt and ridicule among his creatures.

Mr. Jones.—What is blasphemy here, would not be blasphemy in China, and many other countries.

Senator Blair.—We are not dealing with pagan communities. A regulation that may be appropriate in a pagan community, would not

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answer men in a Christian community. Do you mean that there is no such thing as blasphemy?

Mr. Jones.—No; I do not mean that.

Senator Blair.—The Chinaman hardly believes in [30] any god whatever; at least in no such God as we do. Taking our God and these Christian institutions of ours, what do you understand blasphemy to be?

Mr. Jones.—There are many things that the Scriptures show to be blasphemy.

Senator Blair.—The power of the law has undertaken in various States to say that certain things are blasphemy.

Mr. Jones.—Precisely; but if the law proposes to define blasphemy and punish it, why does it not go to the depth of it, and define all and punish all?

Senator Blair.—Perhaps it may not go as far as it ought. You say you are opposed to all laws against blasphemy, cursing, and swearing?

Mr. Jones.—In relation to any one of the first four commandments.

Senator Palmer.—Suppose that what is defined as blasphemy in the statutes of the several States, should detract from the observance of the law and regard for it, would you regard laws against it as being improper?

Mr. Jones.—Under the principle that the Scripture lays down, no legislation in any way can be proper in regard to the first four commandments. There may be many ways in which it would appear very appropriate for civil government to do this or to do that; but when you have entered upon such legislation, where will you stop?

Senator Palmer.—Abstaining from blasphemy is a part of the education of the youth of the country.

Mr. Jones.—That is true. If youth are properly educated, they will never blaspheme.

Senator Palmer.—We pass laws for the education of the youth. The question is whether abstention from blasphemy could not be included in the scope of education. Take it on that ground. [31]

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Mr. Jones.—Idolatry (and covetousness is idolatry) is no more than a violation of the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me;" and if the State can forbid the violation of the third commandment and the fourth, why may it not forbid the violation of the first and the second, and in that case supplant God at once, and establish an earthly theocracy? That is the only logical outcome.

Senator Blair.—Covetousness is a state of mind; but when it becomes practice by stealing—taking from another without consideration—the law interferes.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly.

Senator Palmer.—There is an infection in blasphemy or in covetousness. For instance, if one covetous man in a neighborhood should infuse the whole neighborhood with covetousness to such an extent that all would become thieves, then covetousness would be a proper subject of legislation.

Mr. Jones.—Never! You forbid the theft, not the covetousness. You cannot invade the condition of mind in which lies the covetousness.

Senator Blair.—We do not say that we must invade the condition of mind; but society has a right to make regulations, because those regulations are essential to the good of society. Society by a major vote establishes a regulation, and we have to obey what is settled by the majority.

Mr. Jones.—How shall it be discovered what is blasphemy, as it is only an offense against God? In the Puritan Theocracy of New England, our historian, Bancroft, says that "the highest offense in the catalogue of crimes was blasphemy, or what a jury should call blasphemy."

Senator Blair.—But the law was behind the jury, and said that the practice should be punished. If a [32] jury of twelve men said that one had committed the overt act, then it could be punished. It was the majority who made the law, and the jury only found the question of fact after the law had been violated. The jury did not make the law. This is a question as to making the law.

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Mr. Jones.—It is not wholly a question only of making the law. The question is whether the law is right when it is made. 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. It has nothing to do with religion.

Blasphemy, according to Judge Cooley, in his "Constitutional Limitations,"

> is purposely using words concerning the Supreme Being, calculated and designed to impair and destroy the reverence, respect, and confidence due to him, as the intelligent Creator, Governor, and Judge of the world; ... a bad motive must exist; there must be a willful, malicious attempt to lessen men's reverence for the Deity, or for the accepted religion.

It is seen at a glance that this comes from the old English system of statutes regulating "offenses against God and religion." That is where this statute is placed in every system of civil law; it could not be placed anywhere else. But offenses against God are to be answered for only at his tribunal; and with religion, or offenses against it, the civil power has nothing to do. It is a perversion of the functions of civil government to have it made a party to religious controversies. It will have ample exercise for its power and jurisdiction to keep religious disputants as well as other people *civil,* [33] without allowing itself ever to become a partisan in religious disputes and the conservator of religious dogmas.

But according to Judge Cooley's definition, blasphemy is an attempt to lessen men's reverence, not only for the Deity, but for "the accepted religion" as well. But any man in this wide world has the right to lessen men's reverence for the accepted religion, if he thinks that religion to be wrong. Consequently, as I said a moment ago, that which would be counted blasphemy here would not be counted blasphemy in China; and that which is in the strictest accordance with the word of God and the faith of Jesus Christ here, is necessarily blasphemy in China, or in Turkey, or in Russia. A man who preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ in China commits blasphemy under this definition. He does make a willful attempt to lesson men's

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reverence for their accepted religion, and for the deities recognized in their religion. He had to do so, if he is ever to get them to believe in Christ and the religion of Christ. He has to bring them to the place where they will have no reverence for their deities or for their accepted religion, before they ever can accept the religion of Jesus Christ. It is the same way in Turkey, or any other Mohammedan country, or any heathen country. Wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached in any Mohammedan or heathen country, it is blasphemy under this definition, because its sole object is not only to lesson men's reverence for their deities and for their accepted religion, but to turn them wholly from it, and if possible to obliterate it from their minds.

It is so likewise in Russia. Anybody there who speaks against the accepted religion, or against the saints, or their images, is subject to the penalty of blasphemy, which is banishment for life to Siberia. [34]

But if blasphemy be a proper subject of legislation by civil government, if it be right for a government to make itself the "defender of the faith," then it is perfectly proper for the laws of China to prohibit under whatever penalty it pleases, the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ within the Chinese dominions; because its effect is to lesson men's reverence for the deities recognized by China, and for the accepted religion of the country. It is the same way in any of the other countries named. And in that case there is no such thing as persecution on account of religion. The only persecutions that have ever been, were because of men's speaking against the accepted religion. If this principle be correct, then the Roman empire did perfectly right in prohibiting under penalty of death the preaching of the religion of Jesus Christ. Whenever Paul, or any of his brethren, spoke in the Roman empire, they blasphemed according to the Roman law. They were held as blasphemers, and were put to death under the very principle of this definition, which is the principle of the American statutes on the subject of blasphemy. The Christians had to tell the Roman empire that the Roman gods were no gods. They had to tell the Roman empire that the genius of Rome itself, which the Roman system held to be the supreme deity, was not such; but that it was subordinate, and that there was a higher idea of God and of right than the Roman empire or the Roman law knew anything of. They did speak deliberately against

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the chief deity of Rome, and all the gods of Rome. They did it with the express purpose of destroying reverence for them and for the accepted religion. Rome put them to death. And I repeat, if the principle of the American statutes against blasphemy is correct, then Rome did right. [35]

To make this clearer, I quote a passage from the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania in defense of this principle, in a decision upon this very subject, which says: "To prohibit the open, public, and explicit denial of the popular religion of a country, is a necessary measure to preserve the tranquillity of a government."That is precisely what the Roman empire did. Christianity did openly, publicly, and explicitly deny the popular religion of the country. It did it with intent to destroy men's reverence for the deities and the religion of that country. Rome prohibited it; and upon the principle of the decision of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, which is the principle of American law on blasphemy, Rome did right, and Christianity was a blaspheming religion. The principle of this decision seems to be that those who represent the popular religion of a country have so little of the real virtue of the religion which they profess, that if anybody speaks against it, it is sure to rouse their combativeness to such a degree as to endanger the public tranquillity. Therefore, in order to keep civil those who represent the popular religion, the State must forbid anybody to deny that religion.

This decision of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania is one of the grand precedents that have been followed in all the later decisions upon this subject in the younger States; but this decision itself followed one by Chief Justice Kent of the Supreme Court of New York in 1811, in which he embodies the same principles. He defends the right of the State to punish such offenses against what he calls a Christian people, and not equally to punish like offenses against the religion of other people in this country, by the following argument:— [36]

> Nor are we bound by any expressions in the Constitution, as some have strangely supposed, either not to punish at all, or to punish indiscriminately the like attacks upon the religion of Mohammed, or of the Grand Llama, and for this plain reason: that the case assumes that we are a Christian people, and the morality of the country is deeply engrafted upon Christianity, and not upon the doctrines or worship of those impostors.

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This is only to argue that if the morality of the country were engrafted upon the religion of Mohammed or the Grand Llama, and Christians were to speak against and deny that accepted religion, it would be proper that the State should punish those Christians for so doing. If that principle be correct, then a Mohammedan country has the right to prohibit the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ within its limits.

According to these decisions, Luther and the reformers of his day were blasphemers. The penalty was death, in many cases at the stake, yet under this principle the State did right to put them to death in whatever way the law prescribed; because they did certainly make an open, public, and explicit denial of the popular religion of every country in which they lived, and of all Europe; and if the words of Luther were used to-day in any Catholic country, they would be counted as blasphemous, as a willful and malicious reviling of the accepted religion. The reformers did hold up to ridicule and contempt the popular religion of all Europe. They did right, too; and when the State punished them, it was but carrying out the principles upheld by Chancellor Kent and the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and all the other States that have legislated on the subject of religion.

As I have already stated, it was upon this principle precisely that the Roman empire forbade the preaching [37] of the gospel the Christ. It only forbade an open, public, and explicit denial of the popular religion of the country, yet in forbidding that, it forbade the preaching of the gospel of Christ. But Christ sent forth his disciples to preach the gospel to every creature, and they did it in the face of the Roman law, and in opposition to the whole power of the Roman empire; and everybody in all the world has an undeniable right to make an open, public, and explicit denial of the popular religion of this country, or any other, if he thinks that religion to be wrong.

The principle of these decisions and of the civil statutes against blasphemy, is essentially a pagan principle, and not a Christian principle. It is peculiarly appropriate, therefore, that Chief Justice Kent not only cited the precedents of the church-and-state principles of the colonies and of the British government, but appealed to the pagan governments of antiquity and the papal institutions of modern Europe, as the basis of his decision. It is true that all these nations have set themselves up as the

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special guardians of their deities, and have prohibited the denial of the popular religion; and it is equally true that all these nations have resisted every step in enlightenment and progress that has ever been made in the march of time. Every step forward in religion and in enlightenment has of necessity been taken in the face of all the opposition which these States and empires could bring to bear. But the principles of American institutions are neither pagan nor papal. The principles of the American Constitution which forbids legislation on the subject of religion, are Christian principles. And it is strictly in order for Supreme Courts in making decisions in behalf of what they boast of as the Christian religion, to base their decision upon something else than the course of [38] the pagan governments of antiquity, and the papal institutions of modern Europe. Upon such a subject it would seem to be proper for them to refer to the teachings and the principles of the Author of Christianity, but singularly enough, it has never been done, and doubtless for the very good reason that it never can be done; for the teachings of Jesus Christ are directly against it. His word forbids civil government to have anything to do with what pertains to God. And instead of teaching his disciples to prosecute, to fine, and to punish by civil law those who speak against them or their religion, he says, "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." How can men be brought to respect God or Jesus Christ by civil penalties upon their bodies and goods? How can they respect the religion of men who are ready to prosecute and imprison them? Every principle of the thing is contrary both to the spirit and the letter of Christianity. The religion of Jesus Christ properly exemplified in the daily lives of those who profess it, is the best argument and the strongest defense against blasphemy, both as defined by the Scriptures and by the civil statutes.

Laws, therefore, prohibiting "what a jury may call blasphemy," are pagan, and not Christian. The decisions of the Supreme Courts of New York and Pennsylvania upon this subject are pagan decisions, and not Christian; they are based upon pagan precedents, not Christian. The deadly persecutions of all history, pagan, papal, and so-called Protestant, are justified in these decisions. Michael Servetus was burnt for "blasphemy."

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The only use that ever has been, or ever is, made of any such laws in any country, is to give some [39] religious bigots who profess the popular religion, an opportunity to vent their wrath upon persons who disagree with them. Any man who really possesses the religion of Christ will have enough of the grace of God to keep him from endangering the public tranquillity when his religion is spoken against.

Therefore, I say that we are opposed to all laws of civil government against blasphemy, not because blasphemy is not wrong, but because it is a wrong of that kind with which civil government has nothing to do; and in this we stand wholly upon Christian principle. We stand exactly where the early Christians stood; for, I say again, when Paul spoke in the Roman empire, he was blaspheming, according to the law, was held as a blasphemer and an atheist, and was put to death as such, under the very principle upon which the American laws of blasphemy are sustained.

Senator Blair.—The law was wrong, you say?

Mr. Jones.—Certainly the law was wrong. The Roman law was that no man should have particular gods of his own,—gods not recognized by the Roman law.

Senator Blair.—That law was not for the good of society?

Mr. Jones.—No, sir.

Senator Blair.—Certainly it was not. Then you have to repeal the law or obey it.

Mr. Jones.—It ought to be repealed.

Senator Blair.—During these eighteen hundred years we have contrived to repeal that law; but here comes an intelligent people who have evolved among themselves, as the result of a thousand or fifteen hundred years of history, among other things, the institution of the Christian Sabbath, by writing it in the [40] laws of every State in this country, so that the whole American people made up of communities or States, have enacted the principle of this law.

Mr. Jones.—The same principle is under the bill before the Committee. There is the same principle under it all. If you can legislate in

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regard to the Sabbath, you can legislate in regard to blasphemy; you can legislate in regard to idolatry, and every other offense against God, as did both the Puritan and the papal theocracy.

Senator Blair.—You deny the right of the majority, in other words, to make a law in conformity with which the whole shall practice in society?

Mr. Jones.—I deny the right of any civil government to make any law respecting anything that pertains to man's relationship to his God, under the first four of the ten commandments. I wish right here to show further that this is not only the principle of the word of Jesus Christ, but also of the American Constitution.

Before Christianity was preached in the world, the Roman empire had among its laws these statutes:—

> 1. No man shall have for himself particular gods of his own; no man shall worship by himself any new or foreign gods, unless they are recognized by the public laws.
>
> 2. Worship the gods in all respects according to the laws of your country, and compel all others to do the same. But hate and punish those who would introduce anything whatever alien to our customs in this particular.
>
> 3. Whoever introduces new religions, the tendency and character of which are unknown, whereby the minds of men may be disturbed, shall, if belonging to the higher rank, be banished; if to the lower, punished with death. [41]

The Christians did have a particular God of their own, not recognized by the Roman law. They did introduce a new religion. The Roman empire enforced the law, and that is why the Christians were put to death. If things pertaining to God be a proper subject of legislation by civil government, then no Christian was ever persecuted, and there has never been persecution in this world. All the Roman empire did in killing Christians was to enforce the law. Then the question was with the Christians, at that time, and the question is with us, Is not the law wrong? and did not the Christians have the right to attack the law? That is what they did. When a Christian was brought before the magistrate, a dialogue followed something like this:—

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Magistrate.—"Have you a particular God of your own,—a god not recognized by the Roman law?"

Christian.—"Yes."

Magistrate.—"Did you not know that the law is against it?"

Christian.—"Yes."

Magistrate.—"Have you not introduced a new religion?"

Christian.—"Yes."

Magistrate.—"Did you not know that the law is against it?"

Christian.—"Yes."

Magistrate.—"Did you not know that the penalty is death, for those of the lower ranks?"

Christian.—"Yes."

Magistrate.—"You are of the lower ranks?"

Christian.—"Yes."

Magistrate.—"You have introduced a new religion?"

Christian.—"Yes."

Magistrate.—"You have a God of your own?"

Christian.—"Yes."

Magistrate.—"What is the penalty?"

Christian.—"Death."

That was all. The Romans enforced the law upon the Christians in the first days of Christianity; and there was no persecution in it, if the principle be recognized [42] that civil government has a right to legislate in religious things. The empire had this apparent advantage, too, that the law existed before Christianity was known in the world. Christianity appeared to Rome as nothing else than an uprising against the imperial power. Laws are made to be enforced; and to enforce the law is all that the Roman empire ever did, whether up to the time of Constantine, or at any other time. In fact, all the papacy did in the Middle Ages was to have the emperors enforce the law. We stand to-day just where the Christians did

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at that time; we come to the root of the whole matter, and deny the right of the civil government to legislate on anything that pertains to our duties to God under the first four commandments, and assert the Christian and American principle that every man has the right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.

The principle that the Christians asserted was to render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to deny the right of Caesar to demand anything that pertains to God. They gave their lives in support of that principle, against the law of the Roman empire, and against the very existence of the Roman empire. This principle was asserted and maintained until it forced the Roman empire, with all its power, to recognize the right of every man to have a particular god of his own, and to worship that god as he chose. The Roman empire did come in the days of Constantine and Licinius to that point. At the death of Galerius, it was decreed in the Roman law, by the emperors Constantine and Licinius in the Edict of Milan, that every man should be at liberty to have any god he pleased, and worship him as he pleased. But it was the Christian principle that forced the Roman empire to that point in the face of all its laws and institutions of ages. [43]

Our national Constitution embodies the very principle announced by Jesus Christ, that the civil government shall have nothing to do with religion, or with what pertains to God; but shall leave that to every man's conscience and his God. As long as he is a good citizen, the nation will protect him and leave him perfectly free to worship whom he pleases, when he pleases, as he pleases, or not to worship at all, if he pleases.

In Article VI. of the Constitution of the United States, this nation says that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." By an amendment making more certain the adoption of the principle, it declares in the first amendment to the Constitution, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This first amendment was adopted in 1789, by the first Congress that ever met under the Constitution. In 1796 a treaty was made with Tripoli, in which it was declared (Article II.) that "the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion."

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This treaty was framed by an ex-Congregationalist clergyman, and was signed by President Washington. It was not out of disrespect to religion or Christianity that these clauses were placed in the Constitution, and that this one was inserted in that treaty. On the contrary, it was entirely on account of their respect for religion, and the Christian religion in particular, as being beyond the province of civil government, pertaining solely to the conscience, and resting entirely between the individual and God. This fact is so well stated by Mr. Bancroft in his "History of the Constitution of the United States," that I will here insert it:— [44]

> In the earliest States known to history, government and religion were one and indivisible. Each State had its special deity, and often these protectors, one after another, might be overthrown in battle, never to rise again. The Peloponnesian War grew out of a strife about an oracle. Rome, as it sometimes adopted into citizenship those whom it vanquished, introduced in like manner, and with good logic for that day, the worship of their gods. No one thought of vindicating religion for the conscience of the individual, till a voice in Judea, breaking day for the greatest epoch in the life of humanity, by establishing a pure, spiritual, and universal religion for all mankind, enjoined to render to Caesar only that which is Caesar's. The rule was upheld during the infancy of the gospel for all men. No sooner was this religion adopted by the chief of the Roman empire, than it was shorn of its character of universality, and enthralled by an unholy connection with the unholy State; and so it continued till the new nation,—the least defiled with the barren scoffings of the eighteenth century, the most general believer in Christianity of any people of that age, the chief heir of the Reformation in its purest forms,—when it came to establish a government for the United States, refused to treat faith as a matter to be regulated by a corporate body, or having a headship in a monarch or a State.
>
> Vindicating the right of individuality even in religion, and in religion above all, *the new nation dared to set the example of accepting in its relations to God the principle first divinely ordained of God in Judea.* It left the management of temporal things to the temporal power; but the American Constitution, in harmony with the people of the several States, withheld from the Federal Government the power to invade the home of reason, the citadel of conscience, the sanctuary of the soul; and not from indifference, but that the infinite Spirit of eternal truth might move in its freedom and purity and power.—*Last chapter.*

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At this point I am brought to the assertion of the second of the principles upon which we stand in our [45] opposition to Sunday laws, or any other form of religious legislation: that is, the principle of the Constitution of the United States; and upon this principle I maintain that this proposed Sunday law *is unconstitutional.*

The object of this Sunday bill is wholly religious. The last section shows the object of the entire bill; and that is, "to secure to the whole people rest, ... and the religious observance of the Sabbath day." No one, therefore, need attempt to evade the force of objections against this bill by saying that it is not the religious, but the *civil,* observance of the day that is required; because it is plainly declared in the bill itself, that it is not only to secure rest to all the people, but that it is also to secure the *religious* observance of the Sabbath day. There is not a single reference in the bill to any such thing as the civil observance of the day. The word *civil* is not used in the bill. It is a religious bill wholly. The title of the bill declares that its object is to secure to the people the enjoyment of the Lord's day as a day of rest, "and to promote its observance as a day of *religious worship.*" The first section defines the Lord's day; the second section refers to the day as one of worship and rest; the third section refers to it as a day of religious worship; the fourth section refers to its observance as that of religious worship; and the sixth section plainly declares, what is apparent throughout, that the object of the bill is "to secure to the whole people rest, ... and the *religious* observance of the Sabbath day," on the first day of the week.

It is the religious observance of the day that its promoters, from one end of the land to the other, have in view. In the convention, now in session in this city, [46] working in behalf of this bill, only yesterday Dr. Crafts said:—

> Taking religion out of the day, takes the rest out.

In the "Boston Monday Lectures," 1887, Joseph Cook, lecturing on the subject of Sunday laws, said:—

> The experience of centuries shows, however, that you will in vain endeavor to preserve Sunday as a day of rest, unless you preserve it as a day of worship. Unless Sabbath observance be *founded upon religious reasons,* you will not long maintain it at a high standard on the basis of economic and physiological and political considerations only.

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And in the Illinois State Sunday convention held in Elgin, Nov. 8. 1887, Dr. W. W. Everts declared Sunday to be "the test of all religion."

Sunday is a religious institution wholly; Sunday legislation, wherever found, is religious legislation solely; and this bill does not in its terms pretend to be anything else than religious. Being therefore as it is, religious legislation, it is clearly unconstitutional. In proof of this, I submit the following considerations:—

All the powers of Congress are delegated powers. It has no other power; it cannot exercise any other. Article X. of Amendments of the Constitution expressly declares that—

> The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, or prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

In all the powers thus delegated to Congress, there is no hint of any power to legislate upon any religious question, or in regard to the observance of any religious institution or rite. Therefore, this Sunday bill, being a religious bill, is unconstitutional; and any legislation with regard to it will be unconstitutional. Sunday being [47] a religious institution, any legislation by Congress in regard to its observance, will be unconstitutional as long as the United States Constitution shall remain as it now is.

Nor is this all. The nation has not been left in doubt as to whether the failure to delegate this power was or was not intentional. The first amendment to the Constitution, in declaring that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," shows that the failure to delegate such power was intentional, and makes the intention emphatic by absolutely prohibiting Congress from exercising any power with regard to religion. It is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion. Therefore the first amendment to the Constitution absolutely prohibits Congress from ever making any law with regard to any religious subject, or the observance of any religious rite or institution.

More than this, the National Reform Association knows, and has been contending for twenty-five years, that for Congress to make any Sunday

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laws would be unconstitutional. Yet the National Reform Association is one of the most prominent agencies in urging forward this bill; and the Secretary of that Association stood at this table to-day to plead for its passage. And this only shows that they are willing knowingly to resort to unconstitutional means to secure their coveted power, and to accomplish their purposes. As for Dr. Crafts and his fellow-workers, whether or not they know it to be unconstitutional, we do not know. In the announcements of the national Sunday-law convention now (Dec. 11-13, 1888) being held in this city, it was stated that the church in which the convention was to meet would [48] be festooned with the names of six millions of petitioners; but at the beginning of the first meeting it was stated that there were *fourteen* millions of them. A question was sent up asking how the number could have grown so much larger so suddenly. Mrs. Bateham was recalled to the platform to answer the question, and when she answered it, the cause of such a sudden and enormous growth was explained by the fact that Cardinal Gibbons had written a letter indorsing the bill, and solely upon the strength of his name, seven million two hundred thousand Catholics were counted as *petitioners*.

This was not a complete answer to the question, because the Cardinal's letter does not authorize any such use of it as they have made, at least so much of it as was made public does not. The whole of the letter was not made public there, because, Dr. Crafts said, it was for the Senate Committee. It was laid on the table here to-day. But so much of it as was read merely referred to the action of the Baltimore Council in commanding a stricter observance of Sunday, and said:—

> I am most happy to add my name to those of the millions of others who are laudably contending against the violation of the Christian Sabbath by unnecessary labor, and who are endeavoring to promote its decent and proper observance by judicious legislation.

This was all. He said, "I am happy to add *my name*," etc. He did not say that he added, or that he wished to add, seven million two hundred thousand others with his name, or in his name; yet this was done. But it was not so much to be wondered at, because the same principle had been acted upon before throughout the country, and when five hundred petitioners

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could be made out of *one* hundred, and two hundred [49] and forty *thousand* out of two hundred and forty, it was perfectly easy and entirely consistent to make seven million two hundred thousand and one out of *one*.

This thing was perfectly consistent also with the principle in another point. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned, *adult* residents of the United States, *twenty-one years of age or more,* hereby petition," etc. In counting these seven million two hundred thousand petitioners in behalf of the Sunday law, they thereby certified that all these were Catholics "twenty-one years of age or more." But there was not a man in that convention, and there is not a woman in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, who does not know that there are not that many Catholics in the United States "twenty-one years of age or more." They virtually certified that all the Catholics in the United States are "twenty-one years of age or more," for they distinctly announced that "all the Roman Catholics" were petitioning for the Sunday law. But as they had virtually certified the same thing of the Protestant churches throughout the country, why should they not go on and swing in "all the Roman Catholics" in the same way? They could do the one just as honestly as they could do the other. When men and women professing themselves to be Protestant Christians will do such things as that to carry the Catholic Church with them, it is not to be wondered at if they should be willing to resort to unconstitutional means to make their religious zeal effective in national law.

Senator Blair.—Then you assume that this bill and all Sunday laws concern only the relation of man to God, and not the relation of men to each other?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir, that is the principle upon which we stand. [50]

Senator Blair.—Right there I find fault with your original proposition. You have got to establish, before you can defeat the ground of Sunday laws, that Sunday laws are not for the good of Caesar; that is, not for the good of society.

Mr. Jones.—I have not had time to prove that yet. I will prove fully that Sunday laws are not for the good of anybody.

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Senator Blair.—Come to the point as soon as you can. That is the point in this case, as between you and the law proposed to be enacted.

Mr. Jones.—Very good. For the State to compel men to do no work is to enforce idleness. Idleness is the root of unlimited evil. It is a true proverb that we learned in our boyhood, "Satan always finds something for idle hands to do." In this world, to compel men to be idle is to force them into a line of influences and temptations which in the very nature of things can end only in evil. It is well known, and it is one of the principal grounds of the complaints of those who are working for Sunday laws, that Sunday is, of all the week, the day of the most wickedness; that the record of crime and violence on Sunday exceeds that of any other day of the week, especially in large cities.

Dr. Crafts refers constantly to London as an exemplary city in the matter of enforced Sunday laws, but the fact was brought out last spring by a member of this Committee—Senator Payne—that the statement had lately been "made on authority, that London on Sunday is the most immoral and dissipated city in the world." Now why is this? They argue that it is because the saloons are open on Sunday. But the saloons are open every other day of the week. Then the saloons being open no more on Sunday than on any [51] other day, why is it that there is so much more violence done on Sunday than on other days of the week?—It is because more men are idle on Sunday than on any other day of the week. Upon this point I quote an extract from the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* of March 10, 1888.

> They declare Sunday the moral ruin of the people. They prove it by alleged statistics of criminal prosecutions to show that more crimes of violence are committed on Sunday than on all other days of the week. Why is this? Because the saloons are open?—They are open on other days. This reduces them to the sole reason that it is because it is a day of idleness.
>
> Their argument is absolutely destructive to the beneficence of the custom of a rest day. They continually affirm that a Sabbath day is the very foundation of religion, morals, and society, and they as incessantly declare that the custom of Sunday cessation from work in the cities had made it a day of moral ruin. What is their recourse from the destruction which they charge upon the day of idleness?—*To make statutes more stringent to enforce idleness.* Arguing that idleness

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> on that day leads mankind to moral ruin, they call for a more rigid enforcement of idleness, to lead mankind to the ways of salvation.
>
> Surely there is need to revise their basis in season before they can proceed rationally in legislation. Selling beer is no more a sin on Sunday than on other days. The reason why more crimes of violence are done on Sunday than on other days—if that is a fact—is not that the saloons are open, but that the men are idle. The good of a day of rest for the toilers has to be taken with the drawback of this unavoidable evil from idleness and indulgences of appetites. The *cause* is the *cessation of vocations*.

This argument is entirely sound. We submit to the consideration of any candid mind that it would be far better to allow men to follow their honest occupations [52] on Sunday as they do on other days of the week, than to compel them to be idle, and thus forcibly throw them into the way of all the temptations and evil that beset men in this world. No State, therefore, can ever afford for its own good to enact laws making idleness compulsory, as Sunday laws do.

More than this, to prohibit men from following their honest occupations at any time, under penalties of fine or imprisonment, or perhaps both, is for the State to relegate honest occupations to the realm of crime and put a premium upon idleness and recklessness. It is well known that in many localities if a man will only be idle on Sunday, he can run into all sorts of dissipation and wickedness to any extent, except that of down-right violence, without any fear of prosecution or penalty of any kind. But if any quiet, industrious citizen chooses to engage in his honest occupation,—going quietly about his own business on his own premises on Sunday,—he is subjected to prosecution, to a penalty of a heavy fine, and perhaps imprisonment. This is nothing else than to put a premium upon wickedness. No State can afford to make crimes of honest occupations. No State can afford to put such a premium upon idleness and all its attendant wickedness.

All these complaints of evil and violence and wickedness on Sunday, so enlarged upon by the people who are working for Sunday laws, is an open confession that wickedness is the effect of enforced idleness, and this in itself is the strongest argument that can be offered against the very things for which they plead. The States of the Union have all these years

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been sowing the wind in this very thing, and now they are reaping the whirlwind. And, worse than all, they propose to [53] cure the evils of all this enforced idleness by more stringently enforcing more idleness throughout the whole nation, and by the national power.

It may be answered that this reflects upon the wisdom of God in appointing a day of rest; but it does not. God appointed the Sabbath for a purpose; and that purpose is that men should remember him in his works of creation, and worship him as Creator.

The intention of the commandment enjoining the observance of the Sabbath day, is the honor of God, and his worship as Creator. This worship and the religious sanctions which God has associated with the Sabbath, are considerations which will ever prevent the day from becoming a day of idleness of those who keep the Sabbath in obedience to him; and the worship of God and the religious sanctions which he has put upon the Sabbath, are the only things that ever can prevent the Sabbath from becoming a day of idleness. Those who advocate this Sunday bill well know this. This whole principle is embodied in that statement Dr. Crafts made to the Knights of Labor, that "if you take *religion* out of the day, you take the *rest* out." The same principle is also apparent in the words of Joseph Cook, before referred to, that you will in vain endeavor to secure the enforcement of a day of rest unless you enforce it as *a day of worship;* and unless it be founded on *religious* reasons, it cannot be long maintained.

Thus these men themselves confess the point which I here make: that it is only the religious sanctions and worship that can ever keep a day of rest from being a day of idleness, and of consequent wickedness. But *it is only God* who can furnish those sanctions; *the State never can.* Therefore, next step in the [54] proceeding on the part of those who are calling for this law is to have the State attempt to supply the religious sanctions which belong with the day of rest, and which only can keep it from being a day of idleness and a day of evil. But they know that the State has none of those religious sanctions; and they know that these will have to be supplied to the State by the church, and then the church will call upon the State, by its power, to force them upon the citizen.

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This is precisely what is proposed. Rev. Sam Small, in a sermon in Kansas City last winter, expressed the views of many more than himself, when he said:—

> I want to see the day come when the church shall be the arbiter of all legislation, State, national, and municipal; when the great churches of the country can come together harmoniously, and issue their edict, and the legislative powers will respect it, and enact it into laws.

But any attempt to enforce religious observances only enforces hypocrisy and multiplies sin, because love for God is essential to every act of religious duty. For a man to tender obedience or homage to God when he has no love for God in his heart, only dishonors God, and does violence to his own nature. For anybody to obey God, or perform religious observances from interested motives, is sin; and for the State to exert its power in compelling men to act religiously, and pretend to honor God when they have in the heart no love for God, is only to force them into hypocrisy, and to compel them to commit sin, which, increased and multiplied by the exertion of national power, can end only in ruin, and that speedily.

For as Mr. Buckle has most forcibly expressed it:— [55]

> In this way, men being constrained to mask their thoughts, there arises a habit of securing safety by falsehood, and of purchasing impunity with deceit. In this way, fraud becomes a necessity of life; insincerity is made a daily custom; the whole tone of public feeling is vitiated; and the gross amount of vice and of error fearfully increased.

Consequently, it is only at its own peril that the State can ever enforce the observance of a day of rest.

More than this, for the State to allow itself to be dictated to by the church as is here proposed by Mr. Small, is to render the church superior to the civil power, which can end in nothing but a religious despotism, which is the worst of all despotisms. Thus by every line of reasoning that can spring from the subject, it is demonstrated that for the State to fix a day of compulsory rest can only end in evil. Therefore, my proposition is proved, that Sunday laws are not for the good of anybody.

Further: as it is only the religious sanctions which surround a day of rest, that can prevent it from being a day of idleness, and consequently

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of evil; and as God only can supply these sanctions, it follows that to God only, can Sabbath observance be rendered. He only can command it; he only can secure it; and being a duty which can be rendered only to God, we are brought again directly to the command of Jesus Christ, to render unto God, not to Caesar, that which is God's, which clearly forbids the State to have anything to do with Sabbath observance.

This whole line of argument is fully sustained by the Sabbath commandment itself. That commandment says:

> Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it [56] thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Here are the reasons: first, he rested on the seventh day; second, he blessed it and made it holy. That you may become tired is not given as a reason for doing no work on the seventh day. God does not say that on the seventh day you shall do no work, because if you should, you would overdo or break down your physical system. Nothing of the kind. Man's physical wants are not referred to in the commandment. It say, Work six days, because *the Lord* worked six days; rest on the seventh day, because *the Lord* rested on the seventh day; keep that day holy, because the Lord blessed it and made it holy. It is the Lord who is to be held in view. It is the Lord who is to be exalted. Therefore the fourth commandment and its obligations have solely to do with man's relationship to God. It is not man's *physical,* but his *spiritual,* needs that are held in view in the Sabbath commandment. It is intended to be a day in which to worship God,—a day of holy remembrance of him, and of meditation upon his works. The day is to be kept *holy.* If it is not kept holy, it is not kept at all. When the State undertakes to demand the observance of the Sabbath, or Lord's day, it demands of men that which does not belong to it, but which belongs only to God. When the State undertakes to secure the observance of the Sabbath, it undertakes that which, to it, is an impossible task, because holiness is

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not an attribute of civil government, nor has it either the power or the credentials [57] to promote holiness; and as has been already demonstrated, all that it ever can do in any such effort is to enforce idleness and put a premium upon recklessness, which, for its own welfare, the State can never afford to do. If the State undertakes to supply, from whatever source, the religious sanctions which alone can keep the day from being one of idleness, generating evil, it only enforces hypocrisy, and increases sin.

Therefore I repeat, that by every logical consideration of the subject, I have sustained my proposition that Sunday laws are not for the good of anybody or anything in this world.

Senator Blair.—Do you understand that this bill undertakes to make anybody worship God?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir, I affirm that it does; and I will prove it by statements made by those who stood here to-day. But I have some other points to make first; and here I propose to introduce my historical argument. I want you all to see that in this way the papacy was made in the fourth century. I shall read all that I do read, perhaps, on this point, from Neander's Church History, vol. 2, Prof. Torrey's edition, Boston, 1852. I can only refer to it by the page. As I have related, the Roman empire was forced by the principles of Christ, to recognize the right of every man to worship as he chose. This right was recognized in the Edict of Milan, A. D. 312. But liberty of conscience trembled in the balance but a moment, and then the bishopric, with that ambitious spirit that developed the papacy, took up the strain, and carried forward that line of work which ended in the imperious despotism of the Middle Ages. I want you to see just how that was done, and you will then have no difficulty in seeing the tendency of the present movement. [58]

Neander says:—

> There had in fact arisen in the church a false theocratical theory, originating not in the essence of the gospel, but in the confusion of the religious constitutions of the Old and New Testaments, which ... brought along with it an unchristian opposition of the spiritual to the secular power, and which might easily result in the formation of a sacerdotal State, subordinating the secular to itself in a false and outward way.—p. 132.

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A theocratical theory of government tending to subordinate the secular to itself, was the scheme. In other words, the church aimed to make the ecclesiastical power superior to the civil power. These theocratical bishops made themselves and their power a necessity to Constantine, who, in order to make sure of their support, became a political convert to the form of Christianity, and made it the recognized religion of the empire; for says Neander further:—

> This theocratical theory was already the prevailing one in the time of Constantine; and ... the bishops voluntarily made themselves dependent on him by their disputes, and by their determination to make use of the power of the State for the furtherance of their aims.—*Idem.*

Out of that theocratical theory of government came the papacy, which did subordinate the civil to the ecclesiastical power, and that same spirit is to be guarded against to-day in the United States as much as in any other country.

I want you to see that there is a theocratical theory underlying this whole scheme. Mr. Bateham has said that the Woman's Christian Temperance Union started this movement a short time ago, and that they had worked it up. What is their aim in civil [59] government? I quote from the monthly reading of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of September, 1886,—a monthly reading for all the local Unions throughout the country—the following:—

> A true theocracy is yet to come, and the enthronement of Christ in law and law-makers; hence I pray devoutly, as a Christian patriot, for the ballot in the hands of women, and rejoice that the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union has so long championed this cause.

A theocratical theory, you see, is behind this movement, and is again coming in to interfere in civil things, to establish a theocracy, and to subordinate the civil power at last, to the ecclesiastical.

Senator Blair.—Do you think the question of giving the ballot to women is a religious question?

Mr. Jones.—No. I only read this for the purpose of giving the proof that there is a theocratical theory underlying this, as there was that in the fourth century, so as to show the parallel.

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Senator Blair.—But the parallel seems to imply that the extension of the suffrage to woman is by divine appointment, and is the introduction of a theocratic form of government?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, they want the ballot so as to make a theocracy successful.

Senator Blair.—Therefore you would be against woman's suffrage?

Mr. Jones.—I would be against woman's suffrage, or any other kind of suffrage, to establish a theocracy.

Senator Blair.—But that is not the question. It is possible these women have misstated their own idea there.

Mr. Jones.—No, because I have other proofs. Let me read them. [60]

Senator Palmer.—Do you suppose they intended there a practical theocracy?

Mr. Jones.—I do, sir; but let me read further, and you will get their own words.

Senator Blair.—If these women are trying to overthrow the institutions of the country, and are about to establish a sacerdotal State, we ought to know it.

Mr. Jones.—That is true, and that is why I am speaking here; we want the nation to know it.

Senator Blair.—These women need looking after, I admit.

Mr. Jones.—They do in that respect, and there are many men concerned in the same business.

Senator Blair.—Otherwise it would not be dangerous.

Mr. Jones.—It would be dangerous anyway. A theocratical theory of government is dangerous any where. It is antichristian, as well as contrary to right and the principles of justice.

Senator Blair.—Do you suppose that the government of heaven is a theocracy?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir; but a civil government—a government of earth—is not.

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Senator Blair.—Then why is it dangerous?

Mr. Jones.—Governments of earth are not dangerous when properly controlled.

Senator Blair.—They only say that a true theocracy is yet to come. A millennium is supposed to be coming; perhaps they have reference to a millennium that we have not yet got, so that they will wait some years before they get it.

Mr. Jones.—But I am going to read what kind of laws they propose to make to bring in the millennium.

Senator Blair.—So far as you have read, you have not touched the question; for they say a true theocracy [61] is yet to come, and it may be they are looking to the coming down of the New Jerusalem, for the time of the new theocracy.

Mr. Jones.—No, because no true theocracy can ever come through civil laws, or through politics, or through the ballot.

Senator Blair.—That is not sure at all.

Mr. Jones.—It is by the Scriptures.

Senator Blair.—I do not know; I have read the Bible several times. But go on.

Mr. Jones.—The government of Israel was a true theocracy. That was really a government of God. At the burning bush, God commissioned Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. By signs and wonders and mighty miracles multiplied, God delivered Israel from Egypt, and led them through the wilderness, and finally into the promised land. There he ruled them by judges "until Samuel the prophet," to whom, when he was a child, God spoke, and by whom he made known his will. In the days of Samuel, the people asked that they might have a king. This was allowed, and God chose Saul, and Samuel anointed him king of Israel. Saul failed to do the will of God, and as he rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord rejected him from being king, and sent Samuel to anoint David king of Israel; and David's throne God established forevermore. When Solomon succeeded to the kingdom in the place of David his father, the record is: "Then Solomon sat

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on the *throne of the Lord* as king instead of David his father." 1 Chronicles 29:23. David's throne was the throne of the Lord, and Solomon sat on the throne of the Lord as king over the earthly kingdom of God. The succession to the throne descended in David's line to Zedekiah, who was made subject to the king of Babylon, and who entered into a solemn covenant before God that he [62] would loyally render allegiance to the king of Babylon. But Zedekiah broke his covenant; and then God said to him:—

> Thou profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him. (Ezekiel 21:25-27; see chap. 17:1-21).

The kingdom was then subject to Babylon. When Babylon fell, and Medo-Persia succeeded, it was overturned the first time. When Medo-Persia fell, and was succeeded by Grecia, it was overturned the second time. When the Greek empire gave way to Rome, it was overturned the third time. And then says the word, "It shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him." Who is he whose right it is?—"Thou ... shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Luke 1:31-33. And while he was here as "that prophet," a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the night in which he was betrayed he himself declared, "My kingdom is not of this world." Thus the throne of the Lord has been removed from this world, and will "be no more, until he come whose right it is," and then it will be given him. And *that time* is the end of this world, and the beginning of "the world to come." Therefore while this world stands, a true theocracy can never be in it again. Consequently, from [63] the death of the Christ till the end of this world, every theory of an earthly theocracy is a false theory; every pretension to it is a false pretension; and wherever any such theory is proposed or advocated, whether in Rome in the fourth century, or here in the nineteenth century, it bears in it all that the papacy is or that it ever pretended to be,—it puts a man in the place of God.

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Now I will read another statement as to the purpose of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. It is from the annual address of the President of the National Union, at the Nashville convention, 1887. It is as follows;—

> The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, local, State, national, and world-wide, has one vital, organic thought, one all-absorbing purpose, one undying enthusiasm, and that is that Christ shall be *this world's king*;—

Senator Blair.—"Shall be."

Mr. Jones.—"Shall be this world's king."

Senator Blair.—But you are a clergyman, and you read the Bible to us.

Mr. Jones.—I am going to read a passage presently right on this point.

Senator Blair.—Is it not in the same Bible that the time when Christ is to be the king, is the present?

Mr. Jones.—I am going to read a passage from the Bible in connection with this subject. Allow me to finish this extract:—

> The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, local, State, national, and world-wide, has one vital, organic thought, one all-absorbing purpose, one undying enthusiasm, and that is that Christ shall be *this world's king;*—yea, verily, THIS WORLD'S KING in its realm of cause and effect,—king of its courts, its camps, its [64] commerce,—king of its colleges and cloisters,—king of its customs and constitutions.... The kingdom of Christ must enter the realm of law through the gateway of politics.

That emphasizes "*this world's king*." Jesus Christ himself said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Then assuredly the Woman's Christian Temperance Union stands against the words of Jesus Christ, in saying that he shall be this world's king; and that that kingdom is to enter the realm of the law through the gate-way of politics. Jesus Christ has his entrance through the gate-way of the gospel, and not through politics.

Nor did this purpose end with the Nashville National Woman's Christian Temperance Union convention. The proposition was repeated by the New York national convention last summer, in the following resolution:—

> *Resolved,* That Christ and his gospel, as universal king and code, should be sovereign in our Government and political affairs.

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Well, let us apply the resolution. Suppose the gospel were adopted as the code of this Government. It is the duty of every court to act in accordance with the code. There is a statute in that code which says,—

> If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if the trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

Suppose, then, a man steals a horse. He is arrested, tried, and found guilty. He says, "I repent." "Thou shalt forgive him," says the code, and the Government must conform to the code. He is released, and repeats the act; is again arrested and found guilty. He says, "I repent." "Thou shalt forgive him," says the code. [65] And if he repeats the offense seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turns to the court, saying, : "I repent," the Government must forgive him, for so says that which the Woman's Christian Temperance Union has resolved should be the governmental code.

Any such system as that would destroy civil government in twenty-four hours. This is not saying anything against the Bible, nor against its principles. It is only illustrating the absurd perversion of its principles by these people who want to establish a system of religious legislation here. God's government is moral, and he has made provision for maintaining his government with the forgiveness of transgression. But he has made no such provision for civil government. No such provision can be made, and civil government be maintained. The Bible reveals God's method of saving those who sin against his moral government; civil government is man's method of preserving order, and has nothing to do with sin, nor the salvation of sinners. If civil government arrests a thief or a murderer and finds him guilty, the penalty must be executed, though the Lord does forgive him.

The theocratical theory referred to seems to pervade the whole body, for the eighth district of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, at Augusta, Wis., Oct. 2-4, 1888, representing fifteen counties, passed this resolution:—

> Whereas, God would have all men honor the Son, even as they honor the Father; and,—

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> Whereas, The civil law which Christ gave from Sinai is the only perfect law, and the only law that will secure the rights of all classes; therefore,—
>
> Resolved, That civil government should recognize Christ as the moral Governor, and his law as the standard of legislation. [66]

The law which Christ gave from Sinai is not a civil law; it is the moral law. But if that be a civil law, and this a civil government, what in the world does a civil government want with a *moral* Governor? These excellent women should be informed that civil government is based upon civil law, and has civil governors only. Moral government is founded in moral law, and has a moral Governor only. Any governmental theory that confounds these is a theocratical theory, which is precisely the governmental theory of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, as is demonstrated by these proofs. And any theocratical theory of government since Christ died, is the theory of the papacy.

These extracts prove that the purpose of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union *is* the establishment of "a practical theocracy." Please do not misunderstand me here. There are none who have more respect or more good wishes for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, in the line of its legitimate work, than have we. We are heartily in favor of union, of temperance union, of Christian temperance union, and of woman's Christian temperance union; but we are *not* in favor of any kind of political Christian temperance union, nor of theocratical temperance union. We sincerely wish that the Woman's Christian Temperance Union would stick to its text, and work for Christian temperance by Christian means; and not for Christian temperance by political means, nor for political temperance by theocratical means. I believe in Christian temperance. Not only do I believe in it, but I practice it. I practice Christian Temperance more strictly than the Woman's Christian Temperance Union even preaches it. But believing in it as thoroughly as I do, and endeavoring to practice it as strictly as I believe in it, I would never [67] lift my hand nor open my lips in any effort to *compel* men to practice the Christian temperance in which I believe and which I practice. Christianity persuades men, instead of trying to compel them. By the purity and love of Christ, Christianity draws men instead of

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trying to drive them. It is not by the power of civil government, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, that Christianity secures the obedience of men and the practice of Christian temperance.

The establishment of a theocracy is the aim of the prime movers in this Sunday-law movement, as it was also the aim of the church leaders of the fourth century. And what came of that movement at that time? I read again:—

> This theocratical theory was already the prevailing one in the time of Constantine; and... the bishops voluntarily made themselves dependent on him by their disputes, *and by their determination to make use of the power of the State for the furtherance of their aims*.—Neander, p. 132.

This being their theory, which resulted in the determination "to make use of the power of the State for the furtherance of their aims," the question arises, What means did they employ to secure control of this power? The answer is, They did it *by means of Sunday laws.*

The first and greatest aim of the political church managers of that time was the exaltation of themselves; and second only to that was the exaltation of Sunday. These two things had been the principal aim of the bishops of Rome for more than a hundred years, when Constantine gave them a chance to make their schemes effectual by the power of the State. The arrogant pretensions of the bishop of Rome to secure power over the whole church, was first asserted in behalf [68] of Sunday by Victor, who was bishop of Rome from A. D. 193 to 202.

> He wrote an imperious letter to the Asiatic prelates commanding them to imitate the example of the Western Christians with respect to the time of celebrating the festival of Easter [that is, commanding them to celebrate it on Sunday]. The Asiatics answered this lordly requisition... with great spirit and resolution, that they would by no means depart in this manner from the custom handed down to them by their ancestors. Upon this the thunder of excommunication began to roar. Victor, exasperated by this resolute answer of the Asiatic bishops, broke communion with them, pronounced them unworthy of the name of his brethren, and excluded them from all fellowship with the church of Rome.—(*Mosheim*, chap. 4, par. 11).

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The one means by which these church managers secured from Constantine the use of the power of the State, was the famous edict prohibiting certain kinds of work on "the venerable day of the sun." That edict runs thus:—

> Let all the judges and towns-people and the occupation of all trades rest on the venerable day of the sun; but let those who are situated in the country, freely and at full liberty attend to the business of agriculture, because it often happens that no other day is so fit for sowing corn and planting vines, lest the critical moment being let slip, men should lose the commodities granted by Heaven.

This edict was issued March 7, A. D. 321. Only judges and towns-people and mechanics were to rest on Sunday; people in the country were at full liberty to work. But this did not satisfy the political managers of the churches for any great length of time. "The object of the first Sunday law," says Sozomen, "was that the day might be devoted with less interruption [69] to the purposes of devotion." And as the government was now a theocracy, it was only consistent that all should be required to be religious. Consequently, an additional Sunday law was secured, which commanded *all* people to do no work on Sunday.

> By a law of the year 386, those older changes effected by the Emperor Constantine were more rigorously enforced, and, in general, civil transactions of every kind on Sunday were strictly forbidden. Whoever transgressed was to be considered in fact as guilty of sacrilege.—(*Neander*, p. 300).

Then as the people were not allowed to do any manner of work, they would play, and as the natural consequence, the circuses and the theaters throughout the empire were crowded every Sunday. But the object of the law, from the first one that was issued, was that the day might be used for the purposes of devotion, and that the people might go to church. Consequently, that this object might be met, there was another step to take, and it was taken. At a church convention held at Carthage in 401, the bishops passed a resolution to send up a petition to the emperor, praying—

> That the public shows might be transferred from the Christian Sunday, and from feast-days, to some other days of the week.—(*Idem*).

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History does not say whether or not this petition represented the names of fourteen million petitioners, the greater part of whom never signed it at all. History is also silent as to whether the petition was indorsed by any one man who could be counted for seven million two hundred thousand men. But history is *not* silent as to the reason why it was necessary to send up the petition. The petitioners themselves gave the reason, and it was this;— [70]

> The people congregate more to the circus than to the church.—(*Idem*, note 5).

In the circuses and the theaters large numbers of men were employed, among whom many were church-members. But rather than to give up their jobs, they would work on Sunday. The bishops complained that these were compelled to work: they pronounced it persecution, and asked for a law to protect those persons from such "persecution." The church had become filled with a mass of people, unconverted, who cared vastly more for worldly interests and pleasures than they did for religion. And as the government was now a government of God, it was considered proper that the civil power should be used to cause all to show respect for God, whether or not they belonged to a church, or whether they had any respect for God.

The people, not being allowed to work, crowded the circus and the theater. They had no wish to be devoted; and as they were forced to be idle, a flood of dissipation was the inevitable consequence. Neander says of it:—

> Owing to the prevailing passion at that time, especially in the large cities, to run after the various public shows, it so happened that when these spectacles fell on the same days which had been consecrated by the church to some religious festival, they proved a great hinderance to the devotion of Christians, though chiefly, it must be allowed, to those whose Christianity was the least an affair of the life and of the heart.—(*Idem*).

And further:—

> Church teachers... were in truth often forced to complain that in such competitions the theater was vastly more frequented than the church.—(*Idem*).

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And the church could not then stand competition; she wanted a monopoly. She got it, at last. [71]

This petition of the Carthage Convention could not be granted at once, but in the year 425, the desired law was secured; and to this also there was attached the reason that was given for the first Sunday law that ever was made; namely,—

> In order that the devotion of the faithful might be free from all disturbance.—(*Idem*, p. 301).

It must constantly be borne in mind, however, that the only way in which "the devotion of the faithful" was "disturbed" by these things, was that when the circus or the theater was open at the same time that the church was open, the "faithful" would go to the circus or the theater instead of to church, and *therefore* their "devotion" was "disturbed." And of course the only way in which the "devotion" of such "faithful" ones could be freed from all disturbance, was to close the circuses and the theaters at church time. Thus, and by this means, every reason for not being devoted was taken away from all the people. Then in the very next sentence Neander says:—

> In this way the church received help from the State for the furtherance of her ends.

This statement is correct. Constantine did many things to favor the bishops. He gave them money and political preference. He made their decisions in disputed cases as final as the decision of Jesus Christ. But in nothing that he did for them did he give them power over those who did not belong to the church, to compel them to act as though they did, except in that one thing of the Sunday law. Their decisions, which he decreed to be final, were binding only on those who voluntarily chose that tribunal, and affected none others. Before this time, if any who had repaired to the tribunal of the [72] bishops were dissatisfied with the decision, they could appeal to the civil magistrate. This edict cut off that source of appeal, yet affected none but those who voluntarily chose the arbitration of the bishops. But in the Sunday law, power was given to the church to compel those who did not belong to the church, and who were not subject to the jurisdiction of the church, to obey the commands of the church. In the Sunday law there was given to the church control of the civil power, that by it she could

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compel those who did not belong to the church to act as if they did. The history of Constantine's time may be searched through and through, and it will be found that in nothing did he give to the church any such power, except in this one thing—the Sunday law. Neander's statement is literally correct, that it was "in this way the church received help from the State for the furtherance of her ends."

The work, however, was not done yet. True, the bishops had secured the power of the State to take away from the people all excuse for not being religious; but from the beginning of the whole scheme, the people had no real wish to be religious. They had none of the spirit of devotion in their hearts; and although the State had forbidden them to work, and had shut the Sunday circuses and theaters, still the people would not be religious. The next step to be taken, therefore, in the logic of the situation, was to *compel* them; and the theocratical bishops were equal to the occasion. They were ready with a theory that exactly met the demands of the case; and the great Catholic Church Father and Catholic saint, Augustine, was the father of this Catholic saintly theory. He wrote:—

> It is indeed better that men should be brought to serve God by instruction than by fear of punishment, or [73] by pain. But because the former means are better, the latter must not therefore be neglected.... Many must often be brought back to their Lord, like wicked servants, by the rod of temporal suffering, before they attain to the highest grade of religious development.—(*Schaff's Church History*, vol. 2, sec. 27).

Of this theory Neander remarks:—

> It was by Augustine, then, that a theory was proposed and founded, which... contained the germ of that whole system of spiritual despotism, of intolerance and persecution, which ended in the tribunals of the Inquisition.—(*Church History*, p. 217).

The history of the Inquisition is only the history of the carrying out of this infamous theory of Augustine's. But this theory is only the logical sequence of the theory upon which the whole series of Sunday laws was founded. The church induced the State to compel all to be idle for their own good. Then it was found that they all were more inclined to wickedness. Then to save them from all going to the Devil, they tried to compel all to

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go to heaven. The work of the Inquisition was always for love of men's souls, and to save them from hell!.

Allow me to summarize these statements from Neander: He says of the carrying into effect of the theocratical theory of those bishops, that they made themselves dependent upon Constantine by their disputes, and "by their determination to use the power of the State for the furtherance of their aims." Then he mentions the first and second Sunday laws of Constantine; the Sunday law of 386; the Carthage Convention, resolution, and petition of 401; and the law of 425 in response to this petition; and then, without a break, and with direct reference to these Sunday laws, he says: "*In this way* the church received help from the State for [74] the furtherance of her ends." She started out with the determination to do it; she did it; and "*in this way*" she did it. And when she had secured the control of the power of the State, she used it for the furtherance of her own aims, and in her own despotic way, as announced in Augustine's Inquisitorial theory. The first step logically and inevitably led to the last; and the theocratical leaders in the movement had the cruel courage to follow the first step unto the last, as framed in the words of Augustine, and illustrated in the history of the Inquisition.

That is the system with which Sunday laws belong. That is the theory upon which they are based. They have no other foundation. Mr. Elliott, who has spoken here in behalf of this bill, knows that there is no law in the Bible for keeping the first day of the week. I could read a passage from his own book, "The Abiding Sabbath," page 184, in which he confesses "the complete silence of the New Testament, so far as any explicit command for the Sabbath, or definite rules for its observance, are concerned." And everybody knows that the Old Testament does not say anything about the observance of the first day of the week as Sabbath. Everybody likewise knows that the Old Testament does not say anything about keeping the first day of the week as the day of the resurrection of the Saviour, or for any other reason. Dr. Johnson and others here this morning have said that the first day of the week was chosen because it was a memorial of the resurrection of the Saviour. It is the New Testament that tells about the resurrection of the Saviour. That is granted. Dr. Elliott confesses, and the American Tract Society publishes it, that there is "complete silence of the

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New Testament" in regard to it. Then what right have they [75] to put it into law, and try to compel by civil law all people to keep as the Lord's day that for which there is no scriptural authority? Let me read another passage from another book, printed by the American Sunday-school Union. On page 186 of "The Lord's Day," written by Mr. A. E. Waffle, are these words:—

> Up to the time of Christ's death, no change had been made in the day. The authority must be sought in the words or in the example of the inspired apostles.

Then on the very next page he says:—

> So far as the record shows, they [the apostles] did not, however, give any explicit command enjoining the abandonment of the seventh-day Sabbath, and its observance on the first day of the week.

Dr. Schaff, in the Schaff Herzog Cyclopedia, says:—

> No regulations for its observance are laid down in the New Testament, nor, indeed, is its observance even enjoined.—(*Article Sunday*).

If, then, they confess that Christ gave no law for its observance, why do they want to compel people to observe it? What right have they to compel anybody to observe it? I deny their right to compel me or anybody else to do what Christ never commanded any man to do.

Senator Blair.—You admit there was a Sabbath before Christ came?

Mr. Jones.—Certainly.

Senator Blair.—And he said came not to destroy, but to fulfill?

Mr. Jones.—Certainly.

Senator Blair.—Is there anything in the New Testament which destroyed the Sabbath already existing?

Mr. Jones.—No, sir. [76]

Senator Blair.—Then why does it not continue to exist?

Mr. Jones.—It does exist, and we keep the commandment which provides for the Sabbath.

Senator Blair.—Then you say there is a Sabbath recognized, and that is equivalent to its re-affirmation by Christ?

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Mr. Jones.—Certainly.

Senator Blair.—I do not see from what you are stating, but that Christ recognized an existing law, and that it is continuing at the present time. You say that it is one day, and they say that it is another.

Mr. Jones.—But they are after a law to enforce the observance of the first day of the week as the Lord's day, when they confess that the Lord never gave any command in regard to it. The commandment which God gave says that the "seventh day is the Sabbath."

Senator Blair.—Is it still the Sabbath?

Mr. Jones.—Certainly, and we keep it; but we deny the right of any civil government to compel any man either to keep it or not to keep it.

Senator Blair.—The civil government of the Jews compelled its observance?

Mr. Jones.—That was a theocracy.

Senator Blair.—Does it follow that when the only form of government is a theocracy and that embraces all that appertains to government, another form of government which is not a theocracy necessarily, cannot embrace the same subject-matter as the theocracy? If the subject-matter of a theocratical, a monarchial, or a republican form of government is not the same, to control the establishment of good order in society, pray what is it? We say, and it our form of government, that the people shall legislate, shall construe the law, [77] and execute the law. Under the old theocratic form, God made the law, God construed it, and God executed it through his instrumentalities; but we do just the same thing by the will of the people, that under the theocratic form of government was done in the other way. Now if the Sabbath is necessarily for the general good of society, a republican form of government must make and enforce the observance of the Sabbath just as the theocracy did. You seem to be laboring, as it strikes me, under the impression that a civil government for the good of the people carried on by us under the republican form, cannot do anything that the theocratic form of government does when the theocratic is the only form. They necessarily cover the same subject-

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matter,—the control, the development, the good, and the health of society, it makes no difference which one it may be.

Mr. Jones.—A theocratic government is a government of God.

Senator Blair.—So are the powers that be ordained of God.

Mr. Jones.—This Government is not a government of God.

Senator Blair.—Do you not consider the Government of the United States as existing in accordance with the will of God?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, but it is not a government of God. The government of God is a moral government. This is a *civil* government.

Senator Blair.—A theocracy is a civil government, and governs in civil affairs, as well as in the region of spirituality and morality and religion.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly, and God governs it, and nothing but a theocracy can enforce those things which [78] pertain to man's relation to God under the first four commandments.

Senator Blair.—But this proposed legislation is outside of the theocratic part of it.

Mr. Jones.—Not at all; for it purposes by penalties to "promote" the religious observance of the Lord's day, while nothing but the government of God can do that. That is the point I am making here, that if you allow this legislation, you lead to the establishment of a new theocracy after the model of the papacy, and civil government has nothing to do with religious things. This bill is wholly religious; and if you begin this course of religious legislation, you will end only in a theocracy,—a man-made theocracy,—and that will be the papacy repeated.

Senator Blair.—We have had the Sunday laws in this country for three hundred years. They have constantly become more and more liberalized. Have you ever known an instance, though the sentiment in favor of the Sabbath seems to be growing constantly stronger, where any State in this Union undertook to enact a law that anybody should go to church, which is the danger you seem to apprehend?

Mr. Jones.—Not yet. They are now after the first law. This will lead to that. The law of Constantine was enacted in 321, and it commanded at

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first only that towns-people and mechanics should do no work, that they might be religious. They did not ask for too much at first. As was said in a ministers' meeting in San Diego, Cal., about two months ago, "In this thing you must not ask for too much at first. Ask just what public sentiment will bear, and when you get that, ask for more." And as was said upon this bill by Dr. Crafts in this Capitol,— [79]

> We will take a quarter of a loaf, half a loaf, or a whole loaf. If the Government should do nothing more than forbid the opening of the post-offices at church hours, it would be a national tribute to the value of religion, and would lead to something more satisfactory.

Then in telling what would be more satisfactory, he said:—

> The law allows the local postmaster, if he chooses (and some of them do choose), to open the mails at the very hour of church, and so make the post-office the competitor of the churches.

At another point in the same speech, Mr. Crafts referred to the proposed law as one for "protecting the church services from post-office competition." And in explaining how this could be done, he said:—

> A law forbidding the opening between ten and twelve, would accomplish this, and would be better than nothing; *but we want more*.

And,—

> A law forbidding any handling of Sunday mail at such hours as would interfere with church attendance on the part of the employees, would be better than nothing; *but we want more than this*.

He continues:—

> Local option in deciding whether a local post-office shall be opened at all on Sunday, we should welcome as better than nothing;.... *but we desire more than this*.

How much more? Still he continues:—

> A law forbidding all carrier delivery of mail on Sunday, would be better than nothing; *but we want more than that*.

And when will they ever get enough? It is precisely as it was when the Emperor Constantine forbade the [80] judges, towns-people, and mechanics

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to work on Sunday. That was an imperial tribute to the "value of religion," and led to "something more satisfactory"—to the church managers.

Senator Blair.—Have you ever heard of a proposition's being made in any legislative body to compel any one to attend church on Sunday?

Mr. Jones.—The propositions that are made are for that very purpose, to stop the Sunday trains, the Sunday newspapers,—in short, to stop all work on Sunday, *so that the people can go to church.*

Senator Blair.—But these people come here and say that they have no such purpose, and they have been doing these things in the States for a hundred years, and during the Colonial period anterior to that time. Have you ever heard on the American continent, within the territory of what is now the United States, a proposition or a suggestion in a legislative body to compel anybody to attend church?

Mr. Jones.—Not in legislative body, but in ecclesiastical bodies.

Senator Blair.—Ecclesiastical bodies do not make the laws. Congress is not an ecclesiastical body.

Mr. Jones.—But it is an ecclesiastical body that is seeking to secure and enforce this law, just as the New England theocracy did when "absence from 'the ministry of the word' was punished by a fine;" and then when people were compelled under such penalty to go to church and listen to the preaching, it was such preaching as, said one of the victims, "was meat to be digested, but only by the heart or stomacke of an ostrich."

Nor was this confined to Colonial times or to New England; for after the Colonies became States, North [81] Carolina had a Sunday law,—has yet, for aught I know,—reading as follows:—

> Be it enacted... that all and every person or persons shall on the Lord's day, commonly called Sunday, carefully apply themselves to the duties of religion and piety.

In 1803, Tennessee passed a law embodying the same words. But South Carolina and Georgia went farther than this; South Carolina enacted that—

> All and every person whatsoever, shall, on every Lord's day, apply themselves to the observation of the same, by exercising themselves

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> thereon in the duties of piety and true religion, publicly and privately; and having no reasonable or lawful excuse, on every Lord's day shall resort to their parish church, or some other parish church, or some meeting or assembly of religious worship.

In 1803, Georgia likewise enacted a Sunday law whose first section required all persons to attend public worship. In 1821, the State of Connecticut, in revising its laws, made its Sunday law read in the first section, that—

> It shall be the duty of the citizens of this State to attend the public worship of God on the Lord's day.

This is precisely the line of things proposed by these men and women now working for this Sunday law. This is the first step in that direction. The whole object which they have in view in stopping work on Sunday, is identical with that of the fourth century; namely, in order that the people may be devoted, in order that they may go to church. The very intention of these men in securing the law is religious.

I will refer you to some of the statements of the very men who stood in this room this forenoon, arguing [82] for this Sunday bill. Dr. W. W. Everts, of Chicago, in a Sunday-law convention in Illinois, Nov. 8, 1887, declared Sunday to be the "test of all religion." Taking his own words, what can the enforcement of it ever be but the enforcement of a religious test? Dr. Crafts, who is so prominent in this work, said to the Knights of Labor at Indianapolis, as I have before quoted, and he repeated it in this city last night, "If you take *religion* out of the day, you take the *rest* out of it." This statement was made in reply to a question as to whether a day of rest could not be secured to the working-men without reference to religion. Taking the statement of Dr. Crafts, therefore, its being a day of rest to anybody depends altogether upon whether religion is in it; for if you take religion out, you take the rest out. He, with these others, demands a law compelling the people to take the *rest*. Religion being in the rest, and the rest wholly dependent upon the fact that religion is in it, it is inevitable that their effort to secure a law compelling everybody to rest on Sunday is an effort to establish by law a religious observance.

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Again: in the Boston Monday lectureship of 1887, Joseph Cook said,—

> The experience of centuries shows that you will in vain endeavor to preserve Sunday as a day of rest, unless you preserve it *as a day of worship.*

Further: Dr. Everts said in the Elgin convention:—

> The laboring class are apt to rise late on Sunday morning, read the Sunday papers, and allow the *hour of worship* to go by unheeded.

And in Chicago only three weeks ago, Dr. Herrick Johnson named the matter with which he said the Sunday papers are filled—crime, scandal, gossip, news, and politics—and exclaimed:— [83]

> What a *melange!* what a dish to set down before a man before breakfast and after breakfast, *to prepare him for hearing the word of God!* It makes it twice as hard to reach those who go to the sanctuary, and it *keeps many away from the house of worship altogether.*

Dr. Everts said further in the Elgin convention:—

> The Sunday train is another great evil. They cannot afford to run a train unless they get a great many passengers, and *so break up a great many congregations.* The Sunday railroad trains are hurrying their passengers fast on to perdition. What an outrage that the railroad, that great civilizer, should destroy the Christian Sabbath!

I will give one more statement which sums up the whole matter. In a Sunday-law mass-meeting held in Hamilton Hall, Oakland, Cal., in January, 1887, Rev. Dr. Briggs, of Napa, Cal., said to the State:—

> You relegate moral instruction to the church, and then let all go as they please on Sunday, so that we cannot get at them.

Therefore they want the State to *corral* all the people on Sunday, so that the preachers can get at them.

These statements might be multiplied indefinitely; but these are enough. The speeches, and the sermons, and the work, of those who are in favor of the Sunday laws, are all in the same line. They all plainly show that the secret and real object of the whole Sunday-law movement is to get the people to go to church. The Sunday train must be stopped, because church members ride on it, and don't go to church enough. The Sunday paper must

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be abolished, because the people read it instead of going to church, and because those who read it and go to church too, are not so well prepared to receive the preaching. [84]

It was precisely the same way in the fourth century concerning the Sunday circus and theater. The people, even the church members, would go to these instead of to church; and even if they went to both, it must be confessed that the Roman circus or theater was not a very excellent dish—"What a *melange*!"—to set down before a man to prepare him for hearing the word of God. The Sunday circus and theater could not afford to keep open unless they could get a great many spectators, and so break up a great many congregations; and as they hurried the spectators fast on to perdition, they had to be shut on Sunday, so as to keep "a great many congregations" out of perdition. It is exceedingly difficult to see how a Sunday circus in the fourth century could hurry to perdition any one who did not attend it; or how a Sunday train in the nineteenth century can hurry to perdition any one who does not ride on it. And if any are hurried to perdition by this means, who is to blame: the Sunday train, or the ones who ride on it? And Dr. Johnson's complaint of the Sunday papers, is of the same flimsy piece. If the Sunday paper gets into a man's house, where lies the blame; upon the paper, or upon the one who takes it and reads it? Right here lies the secret of the whole evil now, as it did in the fourth century: they blame everybody and everything else, even to inanimate things, for the irreligion, the infidelity, and the sin that lie in their own hearts.

When they shall have stopped all Sunday works; and all Sunday papers, and all Sunday trains, in order that the people may go to church and attend to things divine, suppose that then the people fail to go to church or attend to things divine: will the religio-political managers stop there? Having done all this that the [85] people may be devoted, will they suffer their good intentions to be frustrated, or their good offices to be despised? Will not these now take the next logical step,—the step that was taken in the fourth century,—and *compel* men to attend to things divine? Having taken all the steps but this, will they not take this? Having compelled men to rest, will they stop short of an effort to supply the religious sanctions which alone can prevent a day of enforced rest from being a day of enforced

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idleness, and consequently of wickedness? The probability that they will not is strengthened by the fact that the theory upon which this is carried on is identical with that of the fourth century—the theory of a theocracy.

I have cited the theocratical purpose of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. The National Reform Association, whose secretary stood at this table to-day to plead for the passage of this bill, aims directly at the establishment of a theocracy in this Government. In their own words, they propose to make this republic "as truly and really a theocracy as the commonwealth of Israel."

The Sunday-law Association also holds much the same theory. In the Elgin Sunday-law convention, Dr. Mandeville, of Chicago, said:—

The merchants of Tyre insisted upon selling goods near the temple on the Sabbath, and Nehemiah compelled the officers of the law to do their duty, and stop it. So we can compel the officers of the law to do their duty."

Nehemiah was ruling there in a true theocracy, a government of God; the law of God was the law of the land, and God's will was made known by the written word, and by the prophets. Therefore, if Dr. Mandeville's argument is of any force at all, it is so only upon [86] the claim of the establishment of a theocracy. With this idea the view of Dr. Crafts agrees precisely, and Dr. Crafts is general field secretary for the National Sunday-law Union. He claims, as expressed in his own words, that—

> The preachers are the successors of the prophets.—(*Christian Statesman*, July 5, 1888).

Now put these things together. The government of Israel was a theocracy; the will of God was made known to the ruler by prophets; the ruler compelled the officers of the law to prevent the ungodly from selling goods on the Sabbath. This government is to be made a theocracy; the preachers are the successors of the prophets; and they are to compel the officers of the law to prevent all selling of goods and all manner of work on Sunday. This shows conclusively that these preachers intend to take the supremacy into their hands, officially declare the will of God, and compel all men to conform to it. And this deduction is made certain by the words of Prof. Blanchard, in the Elgin convention:—

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> In this work we are undertaking for the Sabbath, we are the representatives of God.

And the chief of these representatives of God, will be but a pope again; because when preachers control the civil power as the representatives of God, a pope is inevitable.

These quotations prove, to a demonstration, that the whole theory upon which this religio-political movement is based, is identical with that of the fourth century, which established the papacy. They show also that the means employed—Sunday laws—by which to gain control of the civil power to make the wicked [87] theory effective, are identical with the means which were employed in the fourth century for the same purpose. The next question is, Will they carry the theory into effect as they did in the fourth century and onward? In other words, when they get the power to oppress, will they use the power? A sufficient answer to this would seem to be the simple inquiry, If they do not intend to use the power, then why are they making such strenuous efforts to get it? If Congress lets them have the power, they will surely use it. Human nature is the same now as it was in the fourth century. Politics is the same now it was then. And as for religious bigotry, it knows no centuries; it knows no such thing as progress or enlightenment; it is ever the same. And in its control of civil power, the cruel results are also ever the same.

How appropriate, therefore, is it that Cardinal Gibbons should indorse the national Sunday bill! How natural, indeed, that he should gladly add his name to the number of petitioners in support of the movement to secure legislation in the interests of the church! He knows just how his brethren in the fourth century worked the same kind of scheme; he knows what the outcome of the movement was then; and he knows full well what the outcome of this movement will be now. He knows that the theory underlying this movement is identical with the theory which was the basis of that; he knows the methods of working are the same now as they were then; he knows that the means employed to secure control of the civil power now, are identical with the means employed then; and he knows that the result must be the same. He knows that when religion shall have been established as an essential element in legislation in this Government,

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the experience of fifteen [88] hundred eventful years, and "the ingenuity and patient care" of fifty generations of statesmen, will not be lost in the effort to make the papal power supreme over all here and now, as was done there and then. And in carrying out the instructions of Pope Leo XIII., that "all Catholics should do all in their power to cause the constitutions of States and legislation to be modeled upon the principles of the true church," the Cardinal assuredly *is* glad to have the opportunity to add his name to the more than six millions of Protestants who are set for the accomplishment of the same task.

To those Protestants who are so anxious to make religion a subject of legislation, it now appears very desirable; and it also appears a very pleasant thing to secure the alliance of the papacy. But when they shall have accomplished the feat, and find themselves in the midst of the continuous whirl of political strife and contention with the papacy, not alone for supremacy, but for *existence,*—then they will find it not nearly so desirable as it now appears to their vision, blinded by the lust for illegitimate power.

And when they find themselves compelled to pay more than they bargained to, they will have but themselves to blame; for when they make religion a subject of legislation, they therein confess that it is justly subject to the rule of majorities. And then, if the Romish Church secures the majority, and compels the Protestants to conform to Catholic forms and ordinances, the Protestants cannot justly complain. Knowing, as we do, the outcome of the same kind of movement before, we do not propose to allow this scheme to be worked out here without a decided protest.

Senator Blair.—You are entirely logical, because you say there should be no Sunday legislation by State or nation either. [89]

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir, of course I am logical, all the way through. I want to show you the wicked principle upon which this whole system is founded, and the reason I do this is because the last step is involved in the first one. If you allow this principle and this movement to take the first step, those who get the power will see in the end that they take the last step. That is the danger. See how in the fourth century the logic of it ended only with the Inquisition.

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Senator Blair.—Was the Inquisition abolished by the abolition of the Sunday laws?

Mr. Jones.—No; but the principle of it was established by Sunday laws.

Senator Blair.—Then if the inquisition was established by the Sunday laws, how was it abolished, but by the abolition of the Sabbath? How can you remove an effect except by removing its cause?

Mr. Jones.—The Sunday laws never have been abolished.

Senator Blair.—Then the Sunday law could not have been the cause of the Inquisition.

Mr. Jones.—The power which embodies the Inquisition still continues, and its emissaries have been in this country defending the Inquisition. That same power is now grasping for the control of the civil law, and the same causes generally produce the same effects.

Senator Blair.—And the removal of the causes removes the effects with them.

Mr. Jones.—Sometimes.

Senator Blair.—Therefore the Sunday laws were not the cause of the Inquisition, unless the Inquisition still exists.

Mr. Jones.—No, the Sunday laws did not *cause* the Inquisition.

Senator Blair.—I understood you to say that it did. [90]

Mr. Jones.—I say, through that the church received the power to make the principle and the work of the Inquisition effective. A certain exercise of power may be forbidden, and yet the means by which the power was obtained may not be forbidden. In other words, the power which was obtained through the deception of Sunday laws, may be prohibited in certain things, and yet allowed in many other things.

Senator Blair.—The Lord made the Sabbath, and governed the Jewish nation for nearly three thousand years with a Sabbath. Do you think the Sabbath was for the good of the Jewish people, or for their injury?

Mr. Jones.—It was established for the good of the human race.

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Senator Blair.—Including the Jewish people?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir.

Senator Blair.—It was established as a part of the civil administration.

Mr. Jones.—But the church and the State were one.

Senator Blair.—Therefore what we call the civil administration was included in that theocracy.

Mr. Jones.—The church and the State were one. They were united, and it was a theocracy.

Senator Blair.—If the administration of the Sabbath during these three thousand years, at least, was for the good of the Jews and the human race, why will not the Sabbath be good for the Jews and the human race since the time of Christ, as well as before?

Mr. Jones.—It is for the good of the human race.

Senator Blair.—The civil law must administrate it if it is done. Then we will get no Sabbath now under our division of powers of government, unless we have the Sabbath recognized and enforced by the State authority? [91]

Mr. Jones.—Certainly we have a Sabbath.

Senator Blair.—Your proposition is to strike out the Sabbath from the Constitution and condition of society in these modern times?

Mr. Jones.—No, sir.

Senator Blair.—Certainly so far as its existence and enactment and enforcement by law are concerned.

Mr. Jones.—Yes, by civil law.

Senator Blair.—It was enforced in what we call the civil conduct of men under that theocratic form of government for at least three thousand years.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly.

Senator Blair.—Now the observance of the Sabbath depends upon a compulsory observance of the law.

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Mr. Jones.—Not at all.

Senator Blair.—It required the law of God which he enforced by death, by stoning men to death when they violated it, and we have the Sabbath day only by virtue of what we call the civil law, which is equally a part of God's law.

Mr. Jones.—That government was not organized specially to enforce the Sabbath.

Senator Blair.—They stoned men to death who violated the law.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly; and likewise for the transgression of the other commandments.

Senator Blair.—God enforced it, in other words, by human means.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly; my answer to all that is that that was a theocracy,—a union of church and state. The church was the State, and the State was the church.

Senator Blair.—You say now that there is no State to enforce it? [92]

Mr. Jones.—I say that no government can enforce the Sabbath, or those things which pertain to God, except a theocratic government—a union of church and state. Therefore I say that if you establish such a law as is here proposed, you lead directly to a union of church and state. The logic of the question demands it, and that is where it will end, because the law cannot be enforced otherwise. These gentlemen say they do not want a union of church and state. What they mean by church and state is, for the State to select one particular denomination, and make it the favorite above all other denominations. That is a union of church and state according to their idea. But a union of church and state was formed by Constantine when he recognized Christianity as the religion of the Roman empire. Everybody knows that that was a union of church and state, and that it ended in the papacy. A union of church and state is where the ecclesiastical power controls the civil power, and uses the civil power in its own interests. That is where this movement will end, and that is one of the reasons why we oppose it.

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Senator Blair.—You say the church and state separated shall not do those proper things which the church and state always did when united in the theocracy?

Mr. Jones.—No, sir.

Senator Blair.—Then why do you say that the state—

Mr. Jones.—I did not mean to deny your proposition; I think the way you intended, I mean "Yes," because I certainly do say that the church and state separated shall do those proper things which were done when they were united in the theocracy.

Senator Blair.—If in this division of the powers of [93] government into church and state, you exclude from the powers of the church the establishment and enforcement and regulation of the Sabbath, why do you not necessarily, if the Sabbath is a good thing, pass it over to the control of the State?

Mr. Jones.—Because if the church will not recognize it and preserve it, the State cannot compel people to do it. The State that attempts it is bound to fail.

Senator Blair.—Then you necessarily take the ground that God did wrong in the enforcement of the Sabbath during those three thousand years when his government was both church and state.

Mr. Jones.—No, sir. If God would come himself to govern, and make himself governor, as he did of Israel, he could enforce the law as he did there. But until God does that, we deny the right of all the churches or anybody else, to do it.

Senator Blair.—Even if it is for the good of society?

Mr. Jones.—What they say is for the good of society is for the ruin of society.

Senator Blair.—Do you understand that it is the church or the State that is making this law?

Mr. Jones.—It is the State that is doing it, just as Constantine did it, *to satisfy the churches.*

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Senator Blair.—It may or may not satisfy the churches. The churches give their reasons here, which may be right or wrong, for the establishment of the Sabbath—for this Sunday legislation in all the States. The State, the whole people, make the law. You say that the whole people shall not make a good law because the churches ask for it.

Mr. Jones.—I say the whole people shall not make a bad law, even though the churches do demand it; for any civil law relating to God is a bad law. [94]

Senator Blair.—Then what God did for three thousand years for the good of the Jews and the human race, was wrong?

Mr. Jones.—No, sir; it was right.

Senator Blair.—Then why not continue it?

Mr. Jones.—Because he has discontinued that kind of government.

Senator Blair.—We have done nothing in the world to divide the powers of government into those of church and state. We say those departments shall not interfere with each other.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly.

Senator Blair.—Here and in the States we are trying to run the civil parts. We have taken jurisdiction of a portion of what God has entire jurisdiction, as to the church and state in the civil relations of men. The entire society does that. We put the sovereignty into the hands of everybody except women, and some of us are trying to do that. We have the same subject-matter, the good of society under our control, which under the theocracy was united into both church and state. If you do not let the State continue to do what was essential to society then, and is now, you are striking at one of the great ends for which government exists.

Mr. Jones.—Not at all; because God has discontinued that kind of government.

Senator Blair.—He has not discontinued the necessity of laws for the regulation of society.

Mr. Jones.—He has in that way.

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Senator Blair.—No; it is just as necessary that there should be a Sabbath now for the good of man, as when God made and enforced the law by his direct supervision under a theocracy. [95]

Mr. Jones.—But no government but a theocracy can enforce such laws.

Senator Blair.—Then unless we have a theocracy, we shall have no Sabbath.

Mr. Jones.—We shall have no laws regulating the Sabbath.

Senator Blair.—The Sabbath did not descend to the Jews and to all mankind, because there was a theocratic form of government among the Jews. How did the Sabbath come to mankind at large, when there was no theocratic form of government?

Mr. Jones.—Those nations never kept it. Nobody but the Jews ever kept it.

Senator Blair.—They could have kept it, because you say the Sabbath existed for all; not for the Jews alone, but for the human race.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly, but if they did not keep it, it would do no good.

Senator Blair.—It did not exist for good, then?

Mr. Jones.—Certainly; a thing may exist for my good, and I may refuse to use it, as thousands do the salvation of Christ.

Senator Blair.—I was taking your statement as true that it did exist for good outside of the Jews.

Mr. Jones.—I said it was for the good of man. The Saviour said it was for the good of man. The Saviour died for the good of man.

Senator Blair.—You would abolish the Sabbath, anyway?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, in the civil law.

Senator Blair.—You would abolish any Sabbath from human practice which shall be in the form of law, unless the individual here and there sees fit to observe it? [96]

Mr. Jones.—Certainly; that is a matter between man and his God.

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Senator Blair.—Your time has expired. Please take five minutes to close, as I have asked you some questions; still, they were questions that touched the trouble in my own mind.

Mr. Jones.—Certainly; but I supposed that I was to have an hour to devote, uninterruptedly, to the points in questions.

Senator Blair.—We have always been accustomed to conducting these hearings with reference to getting at the difficulties we had in our own minds, and I do not feel as though you could complain with an hour and ten minutes, if we give you ten minutes more.

Mr. Jones.—Very good. Mr. Chairman, I have shown that in the fourth century this same movement developed a theocracy and in that the papacy, religious despotism, and oppression for conscience' sake. Now I want to show the secret of at least a portion of the present movement. The representative of the National Reform Association spoke here in behalf of this proposed legislation. That Association is asking for such a law and for such an amendment to the Constitution as you have proposed, in relation to the Christian religion in the public schools. That measure pleases them well, and this proposed Sunday law pleases them well.

Senator Blair.—Just incorporate that proposed amendment to the Constitution in your remarks.

Mr. Jones.—Very well; it is as follows:—

> 50th CONGRESS, S. R. 86. 1st SESSION.
>
> Joint Resolution, proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the United States respecting establishments of religion and free public schools. [97]
>
> *Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein),* That the following amendment to the Constitution of the United States be, and hereby is, proposed to the States, to become valid when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the States, as provided in the Constitution:—

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> ARTICLE
>
> SECTION 1. No State shall ever make or maintain any law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.
>
> SEC. 2. Each State in this Union shall establish and maintain a system of free public schools adequate for the education of all the children living therein, between the ages of six and sixteen years, inclusive, in the common branches of knowledge, and in virtue, morality, and the principles of the Christian religion. But no money raised by taxation imposed by law, or any money or other property or credit belonging to any municipal organization, or to any State, or to the United States, shall ever be appropriated, applied, or given to the use or purposes of any school, institution, corporation, or person, whereby instruction or training shall be given in the doctrines, tenets, belief, ceremonials, or observances peculiar to any sect, denomination, organization, or society, being, or claiming to be, religious in its character; nor shall such peculiar doctrines, tenets, belief, ceremonials, or observances be taught or inculcated in the free public schools.
>
> SEC. 3. To the end that each State, the United States, and all the people thereof, may have and preserve governments republican in form and in substance, the United States shall guaranty to every State, and to the People of every State and of the United States, the support and maintenance of such a system of free public schools as is herein provided.
>
> SEC. 4. That Congress shall enforce this article by legislation when necessary. [98]

What, then, do these men propose to do with the civil power when they can use it? The *Christian Statesman* is the organ of that Association, and in its issue of Oct. 2, 1884,said:—

> Give all men to understand that this is a Christian nation, and that, believing that without Christianity we perish, we must maintain by all means our Christian character. Inscribe this character on our Constitution. Enforce upon all who come among us the laws of Christian morality.

To enforce upon men the laws of Christian morality, is nothing else than an attempt to compel them to be Christians, and does in fact compel them to be hypocrites. It will be seen at once that this will be but to invade the rights of conscience, and this, one of the vice-presidents

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of the Association declares, civil power has the right to do. Rev. David Gregg, D. D., now pastor of Park Street Church, Boston, a vice-president of the National Reform Association, plainly declared in the *Christian Statesman* of June 5, 1884, that the civil power "has the right to command the consciences of men."

Rev. M. A. Gault, a district secretary and a leading worker of the Association, says:—

> Our remedy for all these malefic influences, is to have the Government simply set up the moral law and recognize God's authority behind it, and lay its hand on any religion that does not conform to it.

When they have the Government lay its hand on dissenters, what will they have it do? Rev. E. B. Graham, also a vice-president of the Association, in an address delivered at York, Neb., and reported in the *Christian Statesman* of May 21, 1885, said:— [99]

> We might add in all justice, If the opponents of the Bible do not like our Government and its Christian features, let them go to some wild, desolate land, and in the name of the Devil, and for the sake of the Devil, subdue it, and set up a government of their own on infidel and atheistic ideas; and then if they can stand it, stay there till they die.

That is what they propose to do. And that is worse than Russia. In the *Century* for April, 1888, Mr. Kennan gave a view of the statutes of Russia on the subject of crimes against the faith, quoting statute after statute providing that whoever shall censure the Christian faith or the orthodox church, or the Scriptures, or the holy sacraments, or the saints, or their images, or the Virgin Mary, or the angels, or Christ, or God, shall be deprived of all civil rights, and exiled for life to the most remote parts of Siberia. This is the system in Russia, and it is in the direct line of the wishes of the National Reform Association.

Nor is that all. Rev. Jonathan Edwards, D. D., another vice-president of that Association, makes all dissenters atheists. He names atheists, deists, Jews, and Seventh-day Baptists, then classes them all together as atheists. I will read his own words:—

> These all are, for the occasion, and so far as our amendment is concerned, one class. They use the same arguments and the same

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> tactics against us. They must be counted together, which we very much regret, but which we cannot help. The first-named is the leader in the discontent and in the outcry—the atheist, to whom nothing is higher or more sacred than man, and nothing survives the tomb. It is his class. Its labors are almost wholly in his interest; its success would be almost wholly his triumph. The rest are adjuncts to him in this contest. They must be named from him; they must be treated as, for this question, one party. [100]

They class us as atheists, and are going to condemn all alike; and you are asked to give them the power. Remember these are the views of the members of the National Reform Association, whose secretary stood at this table this morning in defense of this Sunday law. These extracts show what his ideas are, and how he would use them. Dr. Everts, of Chicago, who also was here, declared last month in Chicago, in my hearing, on the subject of this Sunday law, that "it is atheism or the Sabbath."

Mr. Edwards continues:—

> What are the rights of the atheist? I would tolerate him as I would tolerate a poor lunatic; for in my view his mind is scarcely sound. So long as he does not rave, so long as he is not dangerous, I would tolerate him. I would tolerate him as I would a conspirator. The atheist is a dangerous man. Yes, to this extent I will tolerate the atheist; but no more. Why should I? The atheist does not tolerate me. He does not smile either in pity or in scorn upon my faith. He hates my faith, and he hates me for my faith.... I can tolerate difference and discussion; I can tolerate heresy and false religion; I can debate the use of the Bible in our common schools, the taxation of church property, the propriety of chaplaincies and the like, but there are some questions past debate. *Tolerate atheism, sir? There is nothing out of hell that I would not tolerate as soon!* The atheist may live, as I have said; but, God helping us, the taint of his destructive creed shall not defile any of the civil institutions of all this fair land! Let us repeat, atheism and Christianity are contradictory terms. They are incompatible systems. *They cannot dwell together on the same continent!*

Senator Blair.—Many atheists are for Sunday laws.

Mr. Jones.—Let them be so if they choose; but what I am striking at, is that these men have no right [101] to say that I am an atheist simply because I do not believe in keeping Sunday.

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Senator Blair.—You come here and seriously argue against these people, because they and the atheists blackguard each other. What have we to do with that? They abuse each other. It is worse in the Christian than in the atheist, because the Christian has some rules to guide his conduct, which the atheist has not. Here seems to be some strong intemperate language which one human being makes use of towards another. An atheist or a Christian alike may find fault with that. I do not know any way that we can interfere with it; but if you claim to argue against this bill because these people abuse atheists, I reply to that by saying that many atheists are for this bill just as these people are. They unite in support of this bill, therefore mutual recriminations amount to nothing.

Mr. Jones.—But the mutual recrimination amounts to this, that although this is confined simply to words between them now,—

Senator Blair.—I do not think you ought to argue to us by taking this precious time of yours and ours to show that these people use intemperate language towards each other.

Mr. Jones.—But I am doing it to show that they use the intemperate language now, but if they get the law, they will use more than the language against them. These men only want to make the State a party to their religious disputes. They want to get the nation by law to commit itself to the defense of religious observances, so they can add its power to their side of the controversy, and send to "hell" or some other place where the Devil is, those who even accidentally disagree with them. But the State has no business to allow itself to [102] be made a party to any religious controversy. That has been the bane of every nation except this, and God forbid that this one should be dragged from its high estate, and made the tool of the irregular passions of religious parties. The State will find its legitimate employment it seeing that these parties keep their hands off each other, and that the ebullitions of their religious zeal are kept within the bounds of civility. It is not safe to put civil power into the hands of such men as these. But that is just what this Sunday bill will do if it shall pass.

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Senator Blair.—The atheist is for this proposed law. He is not intelligently going to support a law which enables these people to burn him at the stake.

Mr. Jones.—I know he is not intelligently going to do it.

Senator Blair.—He is liable to be as intelligent as they are. Mr. Hume was a very intelligent man; so was Voltaire; so was Franklin, if Franklin was an atheist; Franklin was a deist, at all events.

Mr. Jones.—It is safe to say that not one in ten of the people whose names are signed in behalf of this Sunday law now what is the intention of it, and what those will do with it when they get it.

Senator Blair.—Then it is a lack of intelligence on their part.

Mr. Jones.—I know people who signed that petition who would now be just as far from signing it as I would.

Senator Blair.—That is because you told them of those terrible consequences which they had not believed would follow. The masses of the people do not believe that the Christian people of this country have united in every State in this Union for such a purpose.

Mr. Jones.—Here is the principle: Here are six million Protestants and seven million two hundred thousand Catholics— [103]

Senator Blair.—Cardinal Gibbons has written a letter which is in evidence. He is for it, and a great many Catholics are also for it; but it does not follow that those Catholics are for it simply because Cardinal Gibbons wrote that letter. They were for it before Cardinal Gibbons wrote the letter. You must remember that the Catholics in this country are intelligent, as well as we. Some of them are ignorant, some of us are ignorant.

Mr. Jones.—But here is the point. These people are complaining of the continental Sunday—

Senator Blair.—They do not complain of it because it is Catholic; they complain of it because it is not as good for the people as our form of Sunday—

Mr. Jones.—Certainly. And in this movement, the American Sunday, they say, comes from the Puritans, and these people know—

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Senator Blair.—Do you argue against it because it comes from the Puritans, or because it comes from the Catholics? It comes from both, you say; we say it is for the good of society, and that God is for it, because it is for the good of man.

Mr. Jones.—But let me state the point that I am making: I think everybody knows that it is perfectly consistent with the Catholic keeping of Sunday for the Catholic to go the church in the morning and to the pleasure resort if he chooses in the afternoon. These men stand here in convention, and cry out against the continental Sunday and against its introduction here. Everybody knows that the continental Sunday is the Roman Catholic Sunday. Yet these men, while denouncing the continental Sunday, join hands with the Roman Catholics to secure this Sunday law. They have counted here six million Protestants and seven million two hundred thousand Catholics. Suppose this law were secured in answer to these petitions, would [104] they then have a Puritan Sabbath, or a continental Sunday? In other words, would the six million Protestants compel the seven million two hundred thousand Catholics to keep Sunday in the Puritan, or even the Protestant way, or will the seven million two hundred thousand Catholics do as they please on Sunday, and let the six million Protestants whistle for "the breath of the Puritan" which Dr. Herrick Johnson invokes? More than this, if it should come to compulsion between these, would not the seven million two hundred thousand Catholics be able to make it unpleasant for the six million Protestants?

Senator Blair.—I have been all through this that the working people go through. I have been hungry when a boy. The first thing I can remember about is being hungry. I know how the working people feel. I have tugged along through the week, and been tired out Saturday night, and I have been where I would have been compelled to work to the next Monday morning if there had been no law against it. I would not have had any chance to get that twenty-four hours of rest if the Sunday law had not given it to me. It was a civil law under which I got it. The masses of the working people in this country would never get that twenty-four hours' rest if there had not been a law of the land that gave it to us. There is that practical fact, and we

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are fighting with that state of things. The tired and hungry men, women, and children, all over this country, want a chance to lie down, and rest for twenty-four hours out of the whole seven days.

Mr. Jones.—So have I been through this that the working people go through. I have carried the hod by the day. I have swung the hammer and shoved the plane by the day. I am a working-man now just as much as I ever was, though not in precisely the same way; and I say to you that I never was robbed of that [105] twenty-four hours' rest. Nor are there so many compelled to lose it as these Sunday-law advocates try to make out. Dr. Crafts said last night over in that convention that he had had communication with people in every nation but two, and—

> In the world around he could not find a man who had financially lost by refusing to work on Sunday. But many have gained by the conscientious sacrifice.

Much testimony was borne in the Chicago convention last month to the same effect in this country; and in the convention now in session in this city, the Hon. Mr. Dingley, member of Congress from Maine, said last night that the American working-men are indifferent to the efforts which are put forth in this direction.

Senator Blair.—He is wrong about it. Mr. Dingley didn't know what he was talking about when he said that.

Mr. Jones.—He said he had investigated the matter.

Senator Blair.—I have investigated it, and I say that Mr. Dingley was simply laboring under a misapprehension.

Mr. Jones.—Dr. Crafts said this morning that he talked two hours with a convention of laboring men at Indianapolis, answering their questions, until at the end of two hours they indorsed this movement. If they are crying for it, if they are fairly tearing their hair for it, how can it be possible that he had to talk two hours to persuade them that it was all right?

Senator Blair.—Take his statement in full, if you take it at all. He says they are crying for it.

Mr. Jones.—Then why was it necessary to talk to them for two hours?

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Senator Blair.—Then you simply say he did not tell the truth? You discredit the witness?

Mr. Jones.—I do. [106]

Senator Blair.—You say perhaps he did not tell the truth, that is all. I think he was right.

Mr. Jones.—But the two things do not hitch together properly. If they are calling for it so loudly, certainly it ought not to require two hours to convert them. The fact is that the laboring men are not calling for it. Great effort is being made to have it appear so. But the Knights of Labor never took any such step except at the solicitation of Dr. Crafts. This bill had scarcely been introduced last spring before Dr. Crafts made a trip to Chicago and other cities, soliciting the indorsement of the Knights of Labor. Instead of their petitioning for this Sunday law, they have first been petitioned to petition for it; the object of it had to be explained, and objections answered, before they could even be brought to support it. The object of the petition for this bill was explained by Dr. Crafts to the Central Labor Union of New York, and its indorsement secured. the Central Labor Union embraces a number of labor organizations, and the *Christian Union* declares the Central Labor Union to be a "radically Socialistic" organization. This, in itself, would not be particularly significant were it not for the fact that the arguments which Dr. Crafts presents to these organizations to gain their support are entirely Socialistic. Nor are these confined to Dr. Crafts. Other leaders of the movement also advocate the same principles.

Dr. Crafts went to the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor at Indianapolis last month to get the delegates there to indorse the petition for the passage of this Sunday bill. He has referred to this in his speech here this forenoon, and has made a portion of his speech to them and to the Locomotive Engineers a part of his speech here. A report of his speech at Indianapolis was printed in the *Journal of United Labor,* the official journal of the Knights of Labor of America, Thursday, Nov. 29, 1888. He said to them there:— [107]

> Having carefully read and re-read your 'declaration of principles' and your 'constitution,' and having watched with interest the brave yet conservative shots of your *Powderly* at intemperance and other great

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> evils, I have found myself so closely in accord with you that I have almost decided to become a Knight of Labor myself. If I do not, it will be only because I believe I can advance your 'principles' better as an outside ally.

The following question was asked by one of the Knights:—

> Would it not be the best way to stop Sunday trains to have the Government own and control the railroads altogether, as the Knights advocate?

Dr. Crafts answered:—

> I believe in that. Perhaps the best way to begin the discussion of Government control for seven days per week is to discuss this bill for Government control on one day. If the railroads refuse the little we now ask, the people will be the more ready to take control altogether.

The Knights of Labor advocate the doctrine that the Government shall take control of all the railroads in the country, and hire the idle men in the country at regular railroad wages, and run the roads, as it now runs the Post-office Department, without reference to the question whether anything is made or lost by the Government. This is what gave rise to the above question. Dr. Crafts proposes to play into their hands by making the bid for their support, that if they will help the Sunday-law workers get Government control of the railroads one day in the week, then the Sunday-law workers will help the Knights to get Government control every day in the week.

Another question that was discussed both there and at the convention of Locomotive Engineers at Richmond, Va., was the following:— [108]

> Will not one day's less work per week mean one-seventh less wages?

The response to this was as follows:—

> As much railroad work as is done in seven days can be done in six days, and done better, because of the better condition of the men. And on this ground the engineers would be sustained in demanding, and, if necessary, compelling, the railroad company to so readjust the pay schedule that the men will be paid as much as at present.

That is to say, Dr. Crafts and the Sunday-law workers propose to stand in with the laboring men to compel employers to pay seven days' wages for six days' work. This is made certain by the following petition to

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the State legislatures, which is being circulated everywhere with the petition for this bill. I got this at the Chicago convention. Dr. Crafts distributed the petitions by the quantity there, and he is doing the same at the convention now in this city:—

> To the State Senate [or House]: The undersigned earnestly petition your honorable body to pass a bill forbidding any one to hire another, or to be hired for more than six days in any week, except in domestic service, and the care of the sick; in order that those whom law or custom permits to work on Sunday may be protected in their right to some other weekly rest-day, and in their right to a week's wages for six days' work.

Now a week consists of seven days. A week's wages for six days' work is seven days' wages for six days' work. This petition asks the legislatures of all the States to pass a law protecting employees in their *right* to seven days' wages for six days' work. No man in this world has any right to seven days' wages for six days' work. If he has a right to seven days' wages for six days' work, then he has an equal right to six days' [109] wages for five days' work; and to five days' wages for four days' work; and to four days' wages for three days' work; to three days' wages for two days' work; to two days' wages for one day's work; and to one day's wages for no work at all. This is precisely what the proposition amounts to. For in proposing to pay seven days' wages for six days' work, it does propose to pay one day's wages for no work. But if a man is entitled to one day's wages for doing nothing, why stop with one day? Why not go on and pay him full wages every day for doing nothing? It may be thought that I misinterpret the meaning of the petition; that, as it asks that nobody be allowed to hire another for more than six days of any week, it may mean only that six days are to compose a week; and that it is a week's wages of six days only that is to be paid for six days' work. That is *not* the meaning of the petition. It is not the intention of those who are gaining the support of the Knights of Labor by inventing and circulating the petition.

Dr. George Elliott, pastor of the Foundry Methodist Church in this city,—the church in which this National Sunday Convention is being held,—the church that is now festooned with fourteen million petitions that they haven't got,—festooned, at least partly, with *one* seven-million-two-hundred-

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thousand-times-multiplied Cardinal,—Dr. Elliott, while speaking in favor of this bill this forenoon, was asked by Senator Call these questions:—

> Do you propose that Congress shall make provision to pay the people in the employ of the Government who are exempted on Sunday, for Sunday work?
>
> **Mr. Elliott.**—I expect you to give them adequate compensation.
>
> **Senator Call.**—Do you propose that the same amount shall be paid for six days' work as for seven? [110]
>
> **Mr. Elliott.**—I do; for the reason that we believe these employees can do all the work that is to be done in six days. And if they do all the work, they ought to have all the pay.

There it is in plain, unmistakable words, that they deliberately propose to have laws, State and national, Which shall compel employers to pay seven days' wages for six days' work. This is sheer Socialism; it is the very essence of Socialism. No wonder they gained the unanimous indorsement of the convention of the Knights of Labor, and of the Locomotive Engineers, and the Socialistic Labor Union of New York City, by proposing to pay them good wages for doing nothing. I confess that I, too, would support the bill upon such a proposition as that *if I looked no further than the money that is in it.*

But this is not all. The Knights of Labor not only accept the proposition, but they carry it farther, and logically, too. This principle has been advocated for some time be the Knights of Labor in demanding ten hours' pay for eight hours' work—virtually two hours' pay for doing nothing. The *Christian Union* and the *Catholic Review* propose to help the working-men secure their demanded eight-hour law, and then have the working-men help to get the six-day law by forbidding all work on Sunday. Dr. Crafts and Dr. Elliott go a step farther, and propose to secure the support of the working-men by having laws enacted compelling employers to pay them full wages on Sunday for doing nothing. But the Knights of Labor do not propose to stop with this. The same copy of the *Journal of United Labor* which contained the speech of Dr. Crafts, contained the following in an editorial upon this point:—

> Why should not such a law be enacted? All the work now performed each week could easily be accomplished in five days of eight hours

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> each if employment [111] were given to the host of willing idle men who are now walking the streets. It is a crime to force one portion of a community to kill themselves by overwork, while another portion of the same people are suffering from privation and hunger, with no opportunity to labor. The speech of the Rev. Mr. Crafts, published elsewhere, furnishes an abundance of argument as to why such a law should be put in force.

So when the Sunday-law advocates propose to pay a week's wages for six days' work of eight hours each, because all the work can be done in six days that is now done in seven, then the Knights of Labor propose to have a week's wages for five days' work, because, by employing all the idle men, all the work that is now done in seven days can be done in five. And as Dr. Elliott has said, "If they do all the work, they ought to have all the pay." But if a week's wages are to be paid for five days' work of eight hours each, that is to say, if two days' wages can rightly be paid for no work at all, why should the thing be stopped there? If the Government is to take control of the railroads all the time in order to pay two days' wages for doing nothing, and if the States are to enact laws compelling employers to pay employees two days' wages for doing nothing, then why shall not the Government, both State and national, take possession of everything, and pay the laboring men full wages all the time for doing nothing? For if men have the right to one day's wages for no work, where is the limit to the exercise of that right? The fact of the matter is that there is no limit. If a man is entitled to wages for doing nothing part of the time, he is entitled to wages for doing nothing all the time. And the principle upon which Dr. Crafts and his other Sunday-law *confreres* gain the support of the working-men to this Sunday bill is nothing at all but the principle of down-right Socialism. [112]

There is a point right here that is worthy of the serious consideration of the working-men. These Sunday-law workers profess great sympathy for the laboring men in their struggle with the grinding monopolies, and by Sunday laws they propose to deliver the working-men from the power of these monopolies. But in the place of all these other monopolies, they propose to establish a *monopoly of religion,* and to have the Government secure them in the perpetual enjoyment of it. They may talk as much as they please about the grasping, grinding greed of the many kinds of monopolies,

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and there is truth in it; but of all monopolies, the most greedy, the most grinding, the most oppressive, the most conscienceless the world ever saw or ever can see, is a religious monopoly. When these managers of religious legislation have delivered the working-men from the other monopolies—granting that they can do it—then the important question is, Who will deliver the working-men from the religious monopoly?

Senator Blair.—Abolish the law of rest, take it away from the working people, and leave corporations and saloon keepers and everybody at perfect liberty to destroy that twenty-four hours of rest, and lawgivers and law-makers will find out whether or not the people want it, and whether they want those law-makers.

Mr. Jones.—There are plenty of ways to help the working-men without establishing a religious monopoly, and enforcing religious observance upon all. There is another point that comes in right here. Those who are asking for the law and those who work for it, are those who compel the people to work on Sunday. In the Illinois State Sunday convention in Chicago last month, it was stated in the first speech made in the convention, "We remember how that the working-men are compelled to desecrate the Sabbath by the great corporations." [113] The very next sentence was, "We remember also that the stockholders, the owners of these railroads, are members of the churches, that they sit in the pews and bow their heads in the house of God on the Sabbath day."

Senator Blair.—That is only saying that there are hypocrites in this world. What has that to do with this proposed law?

Mr. Jones.—I am coming to that. It has a good deal to do with it. The stockholders who own the railroads act in this way, those men said; and it was stated by a minister in that convention that a railroad president told him that there were more petitions for Sunday trains from preachers than from any other class.

Senator Blair.—There are a lot of hypocrites among the preachers, then.

Mr. Jones.—Precisely; although you yourself have said it. I confess I have not the heart to dispute it.

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Senator Blair.—I do not find any fault with that statement. If it is true, it does not touch this question.

Mr. Jones.—If these preachers and church members will not keep the Sabbath in obedience to what they say is the commandment of God, will they keep it in obedience to the command of the State?

Senator Blair.—Certainly the hard working man needs rest; the preachers, church members, and millionaires may do as they please: the bill comes in here and says that the national government, taking part of the jurisdiction of the civil government of the United States by a concession made by the States, by virtue of its control of interstate commerce, and the post-office business, and the army and navy, will take advantage of what the States have given to the general Government in the way of jurisdiction, and will not introduce practices which destroy the Sabbath in the States. That is the object of this legislation. That is all that is undertaken [114] here. It is simply an act proposing to make efficient the Sunday-rest laws of the State, and nothing else.

Mr. Jones.—But those laws are to be enforced, if at all, by those who are so strongly in favor of them.

Senator Blair.—No, by the State. If these people were in favor of them, or not in favor of them, or violated them, that is another thing. A man may be for a law which he violates. A great many of the strongest temperance people in the world use intoxicating liquors. They say that they realize the evil, and that they are in favor of the enactment of law which will extirpate those evils. The strongest advocates I have ever seen of temperance legislation are men who have come to realize that the grave is just ahead of them. They cannot get rid of the appetite, but they pray the government: for legislation that will save the boys.

Mr. Jones.—That is all right. I am in favor of prohibition straight; but not Sunday prohibition.

Senator Blair.—You cannot adduce a man's practice as a reply to the argument on a question that touches the public good. It does not vitiate a man's principle because he fails to live up to it himself.

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Mr. Jones.—But the secret of the whole matter is this: As an argument for the Sunday law, these men assert that the great railroad corporations desecrate the Sabbath, and by persistently running Sunday trains, also compel the railroad men to work and to desecrate the day. They at the same time assert that the men who own the railroads belong to the churches. If, then, the railroads compel their men to desecrate the day, and the owners of the railroads are church members, then who is it but the church members that are compelling people to desecrate the day?

Further than this, they quoted at Chicago the statement of a railroad president, that the roads "get more [115] requests for Sunday trains signed by preachers" than they do from other people. But as the church members own the railroads, and the preachers request them to run Sunday trains, then who is to blame for the "desecration" of the day but the preachers and their own church members? Can't the preachers stop asking for Sunday trains without being compelled to do so by the civil law? In the Chicago convention last month—November 20, 21—Dr. Knowles, who is secretary of this National Sunday-law Union, said that by the influence of William E. Dodge, even after his death, the Delaware & Lackawanna Railroad Company had resisted the temptation to run trains on Sunday until the present year. But five hundred ministers met in conference in New York and used competing lines on Sunday, and by this the hands of the Sunday observance committee have been tied ever since. After that, when the Delaware & Lackawanna directors were asked not to run Sunday trains, they replied,—

> How can you come to us pleading for us to run no trains on Sunday, when your preachers by the hundreds on Sunday use our rival lines, which do run on Sunday. If your preachers ride on Sunday trains on other roads, we cannot see why they and other people cannot ride on our trains on Sunday. And if it is all right for these other roads to run trains on Sunday,—and certainly ministers of the gospel would not ride on them if it were wrong,—then we cannot see how it can be such a great wrong for us to run Sunday trains.

That is a very proper answer. No wonder the Sunday committee's hands are tied by it. And yet that very conference of five hundred preachers, assembled in New York last summer, took the first decided step toward the

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organization of the National Sunday Association, of which Dr. Knowles himself is secretary.

By these facts there is presented the following condition [116] of things: (1.) Church members own the railroads; (2.) Preachers sign requests for Sunday trains; (3.) The church members grant the request of the preachers for Sunday trains, and the preachers ride on the Sunday trains, and other church members go on Sunday excursions; (4.) Then the whole company—preachers and church members—together petition Congress and the State legislatures to make a law stopping all Sunday trains! That is to say, they want the legislatures, State and national, to compel their own railroad-owning church members not to grant the request of the preachers for Sunday trains. In other words, they want the civil power to compel them all—preachers and church members—to act as they all say that Christians ought to act. And they insist upon quoting all the time the commandment of God, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." But if they will not obey the commandment of God, which they themselves acknowledge and quote, what assurance have we that they will obey the law of Congress or State legislature when they get it, especially as it will rest entirely with themselves to see that the law is enforced? Will they compel themselves by civil law to do what they themselves will not otherwise do? The sum of this whole matter is that they want the civil power to enforce church discipline; and that not only upon themselves, but upon everybody else. The whole system, and all the pretensions upon which this Sunday law is demanded, are crooked.

As to the enforcement of the law, it will fall to those who are working to get it; because certainly those who do not want it will not enforce it, and the officers of the law are not given to the enforcement of laws which are not supported by public opinion. This is proved by the fact that the State of Illinois and the city of Chicago now have Sunday laws that ought to satisfy any reasonable [117] person, and yet not one of them is enforced. And the preachers of that city and State, instead of seeing that these are enforced, call convention after convention to work up more Sunday laws, both State and national.

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What, then, is the next intention?—It is to make it a political question in both State and nation, and make the enactment and enforcement of Sunday laws the price of votes and political support. This is proved by the following resolutions adopted by the Elgin Sunday-law convention:—

> Resolved, That we look with shame and sorrow on the non-observance of the Sabbath by many Christian people, in that the custom prevails with them of purchasing Sabbath newspapers, engaging in and patronizing Sabbath business and travel, and in many instances giving themselves to pleasure and self-indulgence, setting aside by neglect and indifference the great duties and privileges which God's day brings them.
>
> Resolved, That we give our votes and support to those candidates or political officers who will pledge themselves to vote for the enactment and enforcing of statutes in favor of the civil Sabbath.

Such a resolution as this last may work in Illinois, though it is doubtful, but with their own statement made in that convention, it is certain that this resolution can never work under the Constitution of the United States. They stated in the convention that the Sabbath is "the test of all religion." To demand that candidates or political officers shall pledge themselves to vote for the enactment and enforcement of statutes in favor of the Sabbath is, therefore, to require a religious test as a qualification for office. The national Constitution declares that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under this Government; "consequently, no Sabbath or Sunday-law test can ever be applied to any candidate for any national office or public trust. [118]

It is true they use the word *civil* in the resolution, but that corresponds with much of their other work. There is not, and there cannot be, any such thing as a *civil* Sabbath. The Sabbath is religious wholly, and they know it; and in all their discussion of this resolution and the subject generally in the convention, it was as a religious institution, and that only.

Senator Blair.—Is there any other point you would wish to present?

Mr. Jones.—There is another point, and that is, that we will be sufferers under such a law when it is passed. They propose to put in an exemption clause. Some of them favor an exemption clause, but it would not

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in the least degree check our opposition to the law if forty exemption clauses were put in, unless, indeed, they should insert a clause exempting *everybody* who does not want to keep it. In that case, we might not object so much.

Senator Blair.—You care not whether it is put in or not?

Mr. Jones.—There is no right whatever in the legislation; and we will never accept an exemption clause as an equivalent to our opposition to the law. It is not to obtain relief for ourselves that we oppose the law. It is the principle of the whole subject of the legislation to which we object; and an exemption clause would not modify our objection in the least.

Senator Blair.—You differ from Dr. Lewis?

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir, we will never accept an exemption clause, as tending in the least to modify our opposition to the law. We as firmly and as fully deny the right of the State to legislate upon the subject with an exemption clause as without.

Senator Blair.—There are three times as many of you as of his denomination? [119]

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir; there are nearly thirty thousand of us, and we ask for no exemption clause. We stand wholly upon the principle of the question. There should be no exemption from a just law. If the law is right, it is wrong to exempt.

In 1887 Mrs. Bateham herself wrote and printed a "Letter to Seventh-day Believers," proposing in substance that if we would help them to secure a Sunday law, they would exempt us from is penalties. We replied then as we reply now and always. We will not help you to put upon others what we would not have put upon ourselves.

Senator Blair.—You object to it?

Mr. Jones.—We object to the whole principle of the proposed legislation. We go to the root of the matter, and deny the right of Congress to enact it.

Senator Blair.—You say that the proposed exemption does not make it any better?

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Mr. Jones.—Not a bit; because if the rightfulness of the legislation be admitted, then we admit that it is the right of a majority to say that such and such a day shall be the Sabbath or the Lord's day, and that it shall be kept. The majorities change in civil government; the majority may change within a few years,—may change, in fact, at any election,—and then the people may say that the day which we believe should be kept must be observed, or they may say that this day shall not be kept. If we admit the propriety of the legislation, we must also admit the propriety of the legislation to the effect that a certain day shall not be kept, and it makes every man's observance of Sunday, or otherwise, simply the football of majorities. That has been the course of religious legislation from the formation of the papacy onward, and that is the end of religious legislation of all kinds everywhere. [120]

Senator Blair.—Do you not think there is a distinction between a majority in a monarchical government, and a majority in a republican government? In a monarchical government the majority is simply one man who has power.

Mr. Jones.—But in a republic when you throw this subject into civil affairs, it makes a great deal of difference. Why, sir, we would object to the passage of a law enforcing the observance of the day which we keep, and to accept an exemption clause would only be to contradict ourselves. Allow me to illustrate this: There was a time when we did not keep the seventh day as the Sabbath. While we did not keep it, we had the right not to keep it. We became convinced that we ought to keep it; and we are now doing so. We have the right to keep it. More than this, we have the right again not to keep it if we choose not to keep it. But if, while keeping it, we should consent to the State's assumption of power to compel us to do that which we have the right to omit if we please, we would therein resign our freedom of religious faith and worship. If these people would only *think* on this question, they would see that they themselves cannot afford to consent to this legislation, much less demand it. 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

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the truth than his own. He virtually resigns his right to think any further on the subject of religious observances, and must thenceforth accept them ready made from the legislative power; that is, as the majority may dictate. The Sunday observers may thus give away their religious liberty if they choose; but as for us, we do not propose to do it. We are going to assert and maintain our rights. And when these give theirs [121] away, we are going to assert their right to re-assert their rights.

Another thing: An exemption clause is only a toleration clause in disguise. For us to accept it would be but to confess that all religious rights are summed up in the majority, and that we are willing to accept from *them* whatever religious liberty *they* think we ought to have. But no such confession, sir, will we ever make. To no such thing will we ever consent or submit. We are Americans, sir, and citizens of the United States, too, and we assert all the rights of American citizens. The vocabulary of American ideas knows no such word as "toleration." It asserts *rights.* As was said by the Senate Committee on this very subject sixty years ago, so say we,—

> What other nations call religious toleration, we call religious rights. They are not exercised by virtue of governmental indulgence, but as rights, of which government cannot deprive any portion of citizens, however small. Despotic power may invade those rights, but justice still confirms them.

Nor is this all that there is to be said on this point. There is another principle involved. If we should accept the exemption clause, it would not help the thing. It would be exceedingly short. Suppose an exemption clause were given. There are people who would profess to be Seventh-day Adventists for the express purpose of getting a chance to open saloons or houses of business on Sunday. Therefore in outright self-defense, the majority would have to repeal the exemption clause.

Senator Blair.—Call Mrs. Bateham's attention to that.

Mr. Jones.—Let me repeat it. If you give an exemption clause—it has been tried—there are reprehensible men, saloon keepers, who know they will get more traffic on Sunday than they can on Saturday, and [122] they will profess to be Seventh-day Adventists, they will profess to be Sabbath keepers. You cannot "go behind the returns," you cannot look into the

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heart, you cannot investigate the intention, to see whether they are genuine in their profession or not. They will profess to be Sabbath keepers, and then they will open their saloons on Sunday. Then in outright self-defense, to make you position effective, you will have to repeal that exemption clause. It will last but a little while.

Senator Blair.—I agree with you there.

Mr. Jones.—For that reason these people cannot afford to offer an exemption clause; and for the reason that it puts the majority in the power of our conscience, we deny the right to do anything of the kind. I ask the organizations represented here to think of this after this hearing is over. It will bear all the investigation they choose to give it.

Senator Blair.—I should like to call everybody's attention to the point. If you need any legislation of this kind, you would better ask for legislation to carry out your purposes, and be careful that in the effort to get the assistance of the parties against you, you do not throw away the pith and substance of all for which you ask.

Mr. Jones.—Yes, sir, that is the point. To show the workings of this principle, I will state that Arkansas in 1885 had an exemption clause in its Sunday law. That exemption clause, it was claimed, was taken advantage of by saloon keepers to keep open on Sunday. A delegation went to the legislature of Arkansas, and asked them to repeal the exemption clause, so that they could shut the saloons on Sunday. The legislature did it. If they had shut the saloons on Sunday, that would have been all well enough. But they did not even try it. There was not a saloon keeper arrested under that repealed law; there were only two men not keeping the [123] seventh day, who were arrested under it; there was not a man who did not keep the seventh day fined under it; but there were Seventh-day Baptists and some Seventh-day Adventists, poor almost as Job's turkey, who were prosecuted and fined. One man had his only horse taken from him, and his cow, and at last his brethren contributed money to save him from jail. Such men were prosecuted time and again; and the lawyers of the State, under the leadership of Senator Crockett, succeeded in carrying through the legislature, against the persistent opposition of the church managers,

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a bill restoring the exemption clause, to save these poor, innocent people from the persecution that was being carried on.[1]

Senator Blair.—I am glad you put in that fact, because it is something that happened.

Mr. Jones.—I ask leave to read the statement made in the Arkansas Legislature by Senator Crockett, upon that very subject:—

> Let me, sir, illustrate the operation of the present law by one or two examples. A Mr. Swearigen came from a Northern State and settled on a farm in—County. His farm was four miles from town, and far away from any house of religious worship. He was a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and, after having sacredly observed the Sabbath of his people (Saturday) by abstaining from all secular work, he and his son, a lad of seventeen, on the first day of the week went quietly about their usual avocations. They disturbed no one—interfered with the rights of no one. But they were observed, and reported to the Grand Jury, indicted, arrested, tried, convicted, fined, and having no [124] money to pay the fine, these moral, Christian citizens of Arkansas were dragged to the county jail and imprisoned like felons for twenty-five days—and for what?—For daring, in this so-called land of liberty, in the year of our Lord 1887, to worship God.
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> Was this the end of the story?—Alas, no, sir! They were turned out; and the old man's only horse, his sole reliance to make bread for his children, was levied on to pay the fine and costs, amounting to thirty-eight dollars. The horse sold at auction for twenty-seven dollars. A few days afterward the sheriff came again, and demanded thirty-six dollars, eleven dollars balance due on fine and costs, and twenty-five dollars for board for himself and son while in jail. And when the poor old man—a Christian, mind you—told him with tears that he had no money, he promptly levied on his only cow, but was persuaded to accept bond, and the amount was paid by contributions from his friends of the same faith. Sir, my heart swells to bursting with indignation as I repeat to you the infamous story.
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> Another, and I am done. Sir, I beg you and these senators to believe that these are neither fancy nor exaggerated sketches. Five years ago a young man, newly married, came to—County from Ohio.

[1] Yet in the very legislature, that of 1889, the church managers tried their best again to repeal the exemption clause. It was then discovered that they had elected men to the legislature pledged to repeal the exemption clause. The bill passed the Senate, but was killed in the House. This proves my position, that there is no liberty in an exemption clause.

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He and his wife were Seventh-day Baptists. The young girl had left father and mother, brothers and sisters, and all the dear friends of her childhood, to follow her young husband to Arkansas—to them the land of promise. The light of love sparkled in her bright young eyes. The roses of health were upon her cheeks, and her silvery laugh was sweet music, of which her young husband never wearied. They purchased a little farm, and soon by tireless industry and frugal thrift, their home blossomed like a rose in the wilderness. After awhile a fair young babe came to them to brighten the sunshine, and sweeten the bird songs. They were happy in each other's affection and their love for the little one. For them 'all things worked together for good;' for in their humble, trusting way, they worshiped God and loved their fellow-men.

Two years ago the law under which their prosperity and happiness had had its growth was repealed! [125] Accursed be the day which brought such a foul blot upon our State's fair fame! A change, sudden, cold, and blasting as an Arctic storm, came over their lives, and pitilessly withered all their bright flowers of hope. Under this repeal, persecution lifted its ugly, venomous head. The hero of my sad story was observed by an envious, jealous neighbor, quietly working, as he believed God had commanded him, on Sunday. He was reported to that Inquisitorial relic of barbarism, the Grand Jury, indicted, tried, convicted, and thrown into jail because his conscience would not let him pay the fine.

Week after week dragged its slow length along. Day after day the young wife, with baby in her arms, watched at the gate for his coming, and, like Tennyson's Marianna—"She only said: 'My life is dreary—He cometh not,' she said. She said: 'I am aweary—aweary—I would that I were dead."

Then baby sickened and died; the light in the young wife's eyes faded out in tears; her silvery laugh changed to low, wailing sobs. Pale-faced Misery snatched the roses from her cheeks, and planted in their stead her own pallid hue. Sir, how can I go on? At length the cruel law was appeased, and this inoffensive citizen (except that he had loved God and sought to obey him) was released from prison, and dragged his weary feet to the happy home he had left a few short weeks before. He met his neighbors at the gate bearing a coffin. He asked no questions, his heart told him all. No, not all! He knew not—he could never know—of her lonely hours, of her bitter tears, of the weary watching and waiting, of the appeals to God,—that God for whom she had suffered so much,—for help in the hour of her extremity, of baby's sickness and death. He could not know of

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> these. But he went with them to the quiet country burial-place, and saw beside the open grave a little mound with dirt freshly heaped upon it, and then he knew that God had taken both his heart's idols, and he was left alone. His grief was too deep for tears. With staring eyes, he saw them lower the body of his young [126] wife into the grave. He heard the clods rattle upon the coffin, and it seemed as if they were falling upon his heart. The work was done, and they left him with his dead; and then he threw himself down between the graves, with an arm across each little mound, and the tears came in torrents, and kept his heart from breaking. And then he sobbed his broken farewell to his darlings, and left Arkansas forever,—left it, sir, as hundreds of others are preparing to leave, if this General Assembly fails to restore to them the protection of their rights under the Constitution, national and State.
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> On next Monday, at Malvern, six as honest, good, and virtuous citizens as live in Arkansas, are to be tried as criminals for daring to worship God in accordance with the dictates of their own consciences; for exercising a right which this Government, under the Constitution, has no power to abridge. Sir, I plead, in the name of justice, in the name of our republican institutions, in the name of these inoffensive, God-fearing, God-serving people, our fellow-citizens, and last, sir, in the name of Arkansas, I plead that this bill may pass, and this one foul blot be wiped from the escutcheon of our glorious commonwealth.

Arkansas was not alone in this, however, though it was worse there than anywhere else. I myself, with other brethren in California, had to send hundreds of dollars into Tennessee, to support the families of the brethren of our own faith there, while the husbands and fathers who made the money for their support were in jail because they chose to work for their families on Sunday, and make bread for them after having kept the Sabbath according to their conscience. That has been done, Mr. Chairman, in these United States. That is the care these people have for the laboring man.

Senator Blair.—You reason from that that there should be no Sunday law whatever?

Mr. Jones.—If you allow a Sunday law, you must allow it to any extent. It must be enforced. All they [127] did in Arkansas was to enforce the law, simply as in the Roman empire they enforced the law, and put Christians to death. They simply enforced the law, but the law was wrong.

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Any condition of the law that will allow such things as that is a wrong condition of the law.

Senator Blair.—This bill proposes that work must not be done to the disturbance of others. This work was done to the disturbance of others.

Mr. Jones.—I know that this bill for a national Sunday law proposes that work must not be done "to the disturbance of others," and in that very phrase lies one of its worst features. The bill declares that no person shall do any work, or "engage in any play, game, or amusement, or recreation, to the disturbance of others, on the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord's day, or during any part thereof." This leaves it entirely with the other man to say whether that which I do disturbs him; and that is only to make every man's action on Sunday subject to the whim or caprice of his neighbor. And everybody knows that it requires a very slight thing to disturb one who has a spite or prejudice against you. At the Illinois State Sunday-law convention last month (Nov. 20, 21), Dr. R. O. Post, of Springfield, made a speech on the subject of "Sunday Recreation," in which he declared as the sum of his whole speech that,—

> There is no kind of recreation that is proper or profitable on Sunday, outside of the home or the sanctuary.

Only let such a law as is embodied in this bill become of force where R. O. Post, D. D., is, and any kind of recreation outside of the home or the sanctuary would be sure to disturb him, and the one engaged in the recreation could be arrested and prosecuted. But it may be argued that no judge or jury would uphold any such prosecution. That is not at all certain, as we shall [128] yet see; but whether or not it is so, it is certain that if your neighbor should say that what you did disturbed him, under such a law as that he could have you arrested, and put to the inconvenience and expense of defending yourself before the court. In 1887, the city of San Francisco, Cal., had an ordinance on another subject that embodied the very principle of this clause of this Sunday bill. It reads thus:—

> No person shall in any place indulge in conduct having a tendency to annoy persons passing or being upon the public highway, or upon adjacent premises.

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It is easy to see that the principle of this ordinance is identical with that of the clause in the first section of this bill, which forbids anything "to the disturbance of others."

While that San Francisco ordinance was in force, a man by the name of Ferdinand Pape was distributing some circulars on the street, which not only had a tendency to annoy, but actually "annoyed" a business man across the street. Pape was arrested. He applied to the Superior Court for a writ of *habeas corpus,* claiming that the offense charged against him did not constitute a crime, and that the ordinance making such action an offense was invalid and void, because it was unreasonable and uncertain. The report of the case says:—

> The writ was made returnable before Judge Sullivan, and argued by Henry Hutton in behalf of the imprisoned offender. Disposing of the question, the Judge gave quite a lengthy written opinion, in which he passed a somewhat severe criticism upon the absurdity of the contested ordinance, and discharged Pape from custody. Said the Judge:—
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> 'If the order be law, enforceable by fine and imprisonment, it is a crime to indulge in any conduct, however innocent and harmless in itself, and however unconsciously done, which has a tendency to annoy other [129] persons.... Instances might be multiplied indefinitely in which the most harmless and inoffensive conduct has a tendency to annoy others. If the language of the ordinance defines a criminal offense, it sets a very severe penalty of liberty and property upon conduct lacking in the essential element of criminality.
>
> 'But it may be said that courts and juries will not use the instrumentality of this language to set the seal of condemnation on unoffending citizens, and to unjustly deprive them of their liberty and brand them as criminals. The law countenances no such dangerous doctrine, countenances no principle so subversive of liberty, as that the life or liberty of a subject should be made to depend upon the whim or caprice of judge or jury, by exercising a discretion in determining that certain conduct does or does not come within the inhibition of a criminal action. The law should be engraved so plainly and distinctly on the legislative tables that it can be discerned alike by all subjects of the commonwealth, whether judge upon the bench, juror in the box, or prisoner at the bar. Any condition of the law which allows the test of criminality to depend on the whim or caprice of judge or juror, savors of tyranny. The language employed is broad

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> enough to cover conduct which is clearly within the Constitutional rights of the citizen. It designates no border-line which divides the criminal from the non-criminal conduct. Its terms are too vague and uncertain to lay down a rule of conduct. In my judgment, the portion of the ordinance here involved is uncertain and unreasonable.'

This decision applies with full force to this proposed national Sunday law. Under this law, all that would be necessary to subject any person to a criminal prosecution, would be for him to engage in any sort of play, game, amusement, or recreation on Sunday; because the National Reformers are as much in favor of this Sunday law as is anybody else, and there are many of those rigid National Reformers who would be very much "disturbed" by any amusement or recreation indulged in on [130] Sunday, however innocent it might be in itself. And it is left entirely to the whim or caprice of the "disturbed" one, or of the judge or jury, to say whether the action really has or has not disturbed him.

The California decision is, that such a statute "sets a very severe penalty of liberty and property upon conduct lacking in the essential element of criminality." California courts "countenance no such dangerous doctrine, countenance no principle so subversive of liberty," or which so "savors of tyranny," as that which is embodied in these words of this Sunday bill.

Nor is this confined to this particular section; the same principle is found in Section 5. This section provides that if any person works for any other person on Sunday, and receives payment for it at any time, then any person in the wide world, except the parties concerned, can enter suit, and recover the money so paid. If you work for me on Sunday, and I pay you for it, then the first man that finds it out can sue you and get the money. That is what the bill says. When wages are paid for Sunday work, "whether in advance or otherwise, the same may be recovered back by *whoever* shall *first* sue for the same." *Whoever* is a universal term. Therefore, this bill deliberately proposes that when any man who is subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the United States, receives payment for work done on Sunday, except for work of necessity or mercy, he may be sued for that money by whoever first learns that he has received it, and that person shall get the money.

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So much for this bill as it reads. Now, as to the work for which the Seventh-day observers of Arkansas were prosecuted. It was not to the disturbance of others. Let me state some of the facts, the authentic record of which I have, but it is too voluminous to present in detail. [131]

With two exceptions, all the arrests and prosecutions were of people who observed the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath. And in these two exceptions, those who were held for trial were held without bail,—simply on their own recognizance,—and although the testimony was direct and positive, the jury "agreed to disagree," and the cases were both dismissed; while in every case of a Seventh-day Adventist, the least bail that was accepted was $110; the most of them were held under bonds for $250, and some for as high as $500. There was not a single case dismissed, and in all the cases the complaint was never made that what was done had disturbed the worship or the rest of any one. But the indictments were all for the crime of "Sabbath-breaking" by the performance of labor on Sunday.

The statute of Arkansas at that time ran thus:—

> SECTION 1883. Every person who shall on the Sabbath, or Sunday, be found laboring, or shall compel his apprentice or servant to labor or perform service other than customary household duties of daily necessity, comfort, or charity, on conviction thereof shall be fined one dollar for each separate offense.
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> SEC. 1884. Every apprentice or servant compelled to labor on Sunday shall be deemed a separate offense of the master.
>
> SEC. 1885. The provision of this act shall not apply to steamboats and other vessels navigating the waters of the State, nor such manufacturing establishments as require to be kept in continual operation.

In the case of Mr. Swearingen, mentioned by Senator Crockett, the conviction was upon the testimony of a witness who swore that the work for which he was convicted was done on a day which proved to be *seventeen days before the law was enacted,* thus by its enforcement making the law *ex post facto.* The Constitution of the United States forbids the making of *ex post facto* laws. But when a law not being *ex post facto* in itself, [132] is made so by its enforcement, it is time that something was being done to enlighten courts and juries upon that subject, even though it should be by

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an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, providing that no law not being *ex post facto* in itself shall be made so by its enforcement. Then, no the other hand, several cases were tried, and the men convicted and fined *after the law was repealed,* though for work done before.

In almost every case the informer, the prosecuting witness, or perhaps both, were men who were doing work or business on the same day, and sometimes with the very persons accused; yet the man who kept the seventh day was convicted in every instance, while the man who did not keep the seventh day, but did work or business with the man who did, was left entirely unmolested, and his evidence was accepted in Court to convict the other man. I give some instances:—

First, a man by the name of Millard Courtney, who was the prosecuting witness against two men, Armstrong and Elmore, had taken a man with him to where these men were working, and there they made a contract for roofing a school-house; and yet Courtney's evidence convicted these two men of Sabbath-breaking at the very time he was doing business with them.

Second, J. L. Shockey was convicted upon the testimony of a man by the name of Hammond, who went to him on Sunday where he was at work, and bargained with him for a Plymouth Rock rooster.

Third, J. L. James, who worked in the rain for nothing on Sunday that a poor widow, a member of another church, might be sheltered, was convicted of Sabbath breaking upon the evidence of a man who carried wood and chopped it up that same day within seven rods of the man who was convicted by his testimony.

Fourth, one La Fever and his wife went to Allen Meeks's house on Sunday to visit. They found Meeks [133] planting potatoes. Meeks stopped planting potatoes, and spent the rest of the day visiting with them; and yet Meeks was convicted of Sabbath-breaking and fined upon the evidence of La Fever.

Fifth, the second case of Mr. Meeks. Riley Warren went to his house on Sunday, to see him about hiring a teacher for the public school. In the social, neighborly conversation that passed between them, Meeks incidentally mentioned that he had mended his wagon-brake that morning; and yet he was

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convicted of Sabbath-breaking upon the evidence of that same Riley Warren. Meeks was thus virtually compelled to be a witness against himself,—clearly another violation of both the State and United States Constitution.

Sixth, Mr. Reeves's boys were hauling wood on Sunday. In the timber where they got the wood, they met another boy, a Seventh-day Adventist, John A. Meeks, hunting squirrels. They joined him in the hunt, scaring the squirrels around the trees so he could shoot them. Then the squirrels were divided between the Meeks boy and the Reeves boys. Then the Meeks boy was indicted, prosecuted, and convicted of Sabbath-breaking upon the evidence of the father of those boys who were hauling wood, and who helped to kill the squirrels.

Seventh, James M. Pool, for hoeing in his garden on Sunday, was convicted of Sabbath-breaking, on the evidence of a "sanctified" church member who had gone to Pool's house on Sunday to buy tobacco.

Allow me to mention the methods of prosecution. In the case of Scoles, J. A. Armstrong was called before the Grand Jury. After repeated answers to questions in regard to work done on Sunday by different parties in several different lines of business and traffic, he was asked the direct question whether he knew of any Seventh-day Adventists who worked on [134] Sunday, and when in the nature of the case he answered in the affirmative, every one of the Seventh-day Adventists whom he named was indicted, and not one of any other class or trade.

In the second case of James A. Armstrong; he was arrested at the instance of the mayor. When asked for the affidavit upon which Armstrong was arrested, the mayor said that A. J. Vaughn had called his attention to Armstrong's working, and had said, "Now see that you do your duty," yet Vaughn testified under oath that he did not see Armstrong at all on the day referred to. Armstrong was not only arrested at the instance of the mayor, but he was also tried before the mayor, who acted as Justice of the Peace. And when Vaughn testified that he had not seen Armstrong at all on the day referred to, this made the mayor, virtually, both prosecuting witness and judge; and the questions which he asked show that that was precisely his position, and his own view of the case. The question which he asked to each

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of the first two witnesses was, "What do you know about Mr. Armstrong's working on Sunday, June 27?" This question assumes all that was expected to be proved on the trial.

This is enough to show the workings of such a Sunday law as is embodied in this Senate bill. There were many other cases, every one in the same line. But throughout the whole list of cases, it is only the record of how people who were performing honest labor on their own premises in a way in which it was impossible to do harm to any soul on earth, were indicted, prosecuted, and convicted upon the evidence of men who, if there were any wrong involved in the case at all, were more guilty than they. If religious persecution could possibly be more clearly demonstrated than it is in this thing, we hope never to see an illustration of it.

It may be asked, Why was not an appeal taken? An appeal was taken to the Supreme Court of the [135] State, in the first case that was tried. The judgment of the lower Court was confirmed in an opinion closing with these words:—

> The appellant's argument, then, is reduced to this: That because he conscientiously believes he is permitted by the law of God to labor on Sunday, he may violate with impunity the statute declaring it illegal to do so; but a man's religious belief cannot be accepted as a justification for his committing an overt act made criminal by the law of the land. If the law operates harshly, as laws sometimes do, the remedy is in the hands of the legislature. It is not the province of the judiciary to pass upon the wisdom or policy of legislation. That is for the members of the legislative department; and the only appeal from their determination is to the constituency.

This decision of the Supreme Court is of the same piece with the prosecutions and judicial processes throughout. It gives to the legislature all the omnipotence of the British Parliament, and in that does away with all necessity for a Constitution. The decision on this principle alone, is un-American. No legislative body in this country is framed upon the model of the British Parliament in respect to power. In this country, the powers of every legislature are defined and limited by Constitutions. It is the prerogative of Supreme Courts to define the meaning of the Constitution, and to decide whether an act of the legislature is Constitutional or not.

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If the act is Constitutional, then it must stand, whatever the results may be. And the Supreme Court is the body by which the Constitutionality or the unconstitutionality of any statute is to be discovered. But if, as this decision declares, the legislature is omnipotent, and that which it does must stand as law, then there is no use for a Constitution. "One of the objects for which the judiciary department is established, is the protection of the Constitutional rights of the citizens." [136]

So long as there is a Constitution above the legislature, which defines and limits its powers, and protects and guards the rights of the citizens, so long it is the province of the Supreme Court to pronounce upon the acts of the legislature. The Supreme Court of Arkansas, therefore, in this case, clearly abdicated one of the very functions for which it was created, or else subverted the Constitution of Arkansas; and in either case, bestowed upon the legislature the omnipotence of the British Parliament, which is contrary to every principle of American institutions. Nor is the State of Arkansas an exception in this case; for this is the usual procedure of Supreme Courts in sustaining Sunday laws. They cannot be sustained upon any American principle; resort has to be made in every instance, and has been with scarcely an exception, either to the church-and-state principles of the British Government, or to the British principle of the omnipotence of the legislative power. But American principles are far above and far in advance of the principles of the British Government, in that they recognize Constitutional limitations upon the legislative power, and countenance no union of church and state; consequently Sunday laws never have been, and never can be, sustained upon American principles.

That this stricture upon Supreme Court of Arkansas is not unjust, we have the clearest proof. The three judges who then composed the Supreme Court, were all members of the Bar Association of the State of Arkansas. In less than three months after this decision was rendered, the Bar Association *unanimously* made a report to the State on "law and law reform," an official copy of which I have in my possession. In that report, under the heading "Sunday Laws," is the following:—

> Our statute as it stands in Mansfield's Digest, provides that 'persons who are members of any religious [137] society who observe as

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> Sabbath any other day of the week than the Christian Sabbath, or Sunday, shall not be subject to the penalties of this act [the Sunday law], so that they observe one day in seven, agreeably to the faith and practice of their church or society.'—*Mans. Dig., sec. 1886.*
>
> This statute had been in force from the time of the organization of the State government; but it was unfortunately repealed by act of March 3, 1885.—Acts 1885, 37.
>
> While the Jews adhere, of course, to the letter of the original command to remember the seventh day of the week, there is also in the State a small but respectable body of Christians who consistently believe that the seventh day is the proper day to be kept sacred; and in the case of Scoles *vs.* State, our Supreme Court was compelled to affirm a judgment against a member of one of these churches, for worshiping God according to the dictates of his own conscience, supported, as he supposed, by good theological arguments. It is very evident that the system now in force, savoring, as it does, very much of religious persecution, is a relic of the Middle Ages, when it was thought that men could be made orthodox by an act of parliament. Even in Massachusetts, where Sabbatarian laws have always been enforced with unusual vigor, exceptions are made in favor of persons who religiously observe any other day in the place of Sunday. We think that the law as it stood in Mansfield's Digest, should be restored, with such an amendment as would prevent the sale of spirits on Sunday, as that was probably the object of repealing the above section.

Now the Arkansas Constitution says:—

> All men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences; no man can of right be compelled to attend, erect, or support any place of worship, or to maintain any ministry, against his consent. No human authority can, in any case or manner whatsoever, control or interfere with the right of conscience; and no [138] preference shall ever be given by law to any religious establishment, denomination, or mode of worship, above any other.

This report of the Bar Association says,

> In the case of Scoles *vs.* State, our Supreme Court was compelled to affirm a judgment against a member of one of these churches, for worshiping God according to the dictates of his own conscience.

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The members of the Supreme Court being members of the Bar Association, in that report it is confessed that they confirmed a judgment against a man for doing that which the Constitution explicitly declares all men have a natural and indefeasible right to do.

Senator Blair.—Then if they had a law like this, they were wrongly convicted under the law, just as innocent men are sometimes hung; but you cannot reason that there should be no law against murder because innocent men are sometimes executed. It is fault in the administration of the law. You cannot reason from that that there should be no law.

Mr. Jones.—If there had been arrests of other people for working on Sunday, in anything like the numbers that there were of seventh-day observers, and the law had been enforced upon all alike, then the iniquity would not have been so apparent; or if those who were not seventh-day observers, and who were arrested, had been convicted, even then the case would not have been so clearly one of persecution. But when in all the record of the whole two years' existence of the law in this form, there was not a solitary saloon keeper arrested, there was not a person who did not observe the seventh day arrested, with the two exceptions named, then there could be no clearer demonstration that the law was used only as a means to vent religious spite against a class of citizens guiltless of any crime, but only of professing a religion different from that of the majority. [139]

The fact of the matter is,—and the whole history of these proceedings proves it,—that from beginning to end these prosecutions were only the manifestation of that persecuting, intolerant spirit that will always make itself felt when any class of religionists can control the civil power. The information upon which the indictments were found, was treacherously given, and in the very spirit of the Inquisition. The indictment itself is a travesty of legal form, and a libel upon justice. The principle was more worthy of the Dark Ages than of any civilized nation or modern time; and the Supreme Court decision that confirmed the convictions, is one which is contrary to the first principles of Constitutional law or Constitutional compacts.

And if Congress should lend its sanction to religious legislation to the extent of passing this national Sunday bill, now under consideration,

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and its principles should be made of force in all the States, the history of Arkansas from 1885-86 would be repeated through the whole extent of the nation. This I can prove, at least so far as the intention goes of those who are actively in favor of it. Rev. D. Mc Allister is one of the principal men of the National Reform Association. That Association and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union held a joint convention at Lakeside, Ohio, in July, 1887; and speaking on the subject of a national Sunday law, Dr. Mc Allister said:—

> Let a man be what he may,—Jew, seventh-day observer of some other denomination, or those who do not believe in the Christian Sabbath,—let the law apply to every one, that there shall be no public desecration of the first day of the week, the Christian Sabbath, the day of rest for the nation. They may hold any other day of rest of the week as sacred, and observe it; but that day which is the one day in seven for the nation at large, let that not be publicly desecrated by any one, by officer [140] in the Government, or by private citizen, high or low, rich or poor.

Then some one stated from the audience that—

> There is a law in the State of Arkansas enforcing Sunday observance upon the people, and the result has been that many good persons have not only been imprisoned, but have lost their property, and even their lives.

To which Mr. Mc Allister coolly replied:—

> It is better that a few should suffer, than that the whole nation should lose its Sabbath.

This argument is identical with that by which the Pharisees in Christ's day justified themselves in killing him. It was said:—

> It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. John 11:50.

And then says the record:—

> Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. Verse 53.

It is because of these principles, unblushingly avowed by the very men who stand in the lead in the effort to secure the enactment of this national Sunday law; and because of the practical effect of such a law in

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Arkansas and Tennessee, and to some extent in Pennsylvania,—it is because of these things that we say to you, gentlemen of the United States Senate, you cannot afford to give to these men the power which they seek in the enactment of this proposed Sunday law. The speech of Senator Crockett's, which I have read, was made in the legislature of Arkansas, when he was pleading for the restoration of that exemption clause,—when he was pleading for toleration, in fact. [141]

Senator Blair.—Do you know whether this young man had money or friends?

Mr. Jones.—Dr. Lewis, can you certify whether he had money?

Dr. Lewis.—The case was never reported to other churches for relief. I do not know as to his personal estate.

Senator Blair.—Do you not think it was a peculiar man who would allow his child to be killed and his wife to starve?

Dr. Lewis.—The case was not reported to our churches in the North.

Mr. Jones.—About that peculiarity I will say that John Bunyan stayed twelve years in Bedford jail when he could have got out by simply saying the word "yes," and agreeing that he would not preach.

Senator Blair.—It was a very different thing to be called on to say that he would abstain from the performance of a great duty in his church. He preached the gospel, and he would not agree not to preach the gospel. But here is a man who lets his wife and child die rather than pay twenty-five or fifty dollars and get out, and have an opportunity to go to work for them.

Mr. Jones.—What kind of law is that which puts a man upon his conscience to choose between his wife and child and paying a fine of twenty-five or fifty dollars? But suppose he had paid the fine, and got out and gone to work again, how long could he have worked? When the next Sunday came round, it was his duty to his wife and child to work for their support. Is he to go to work on Sunday, and go through the course of prosecution again, and again pay a fine of twenty-five or fifty dollars? How long could this be kept up? There are not many poor farmers who can clear from twenty-five to fifty dollars every week above all expenses, to be devoted to paying regular

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fines for the privilege of following [142] their honest occupation on their own premises. But it will be said, "Let him not work on Sunday, then he would not have to pay a fine." Well, if he consents to do no work on Sunday, he consents to be robbed of one-sixth of his time, which he honestly owes to the support of his wife and child. For to rob him of one-sixth of his time is precisely what the State does in such a case; and it is either confiscation outright, or confiscation under the guise of a fine imposed as punishment for his refusing to allow himself to be robbed of one-sixth of his time. Either this, or else he must give up his right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience and the word of God, and so surrender his rights of conscience altogether. It comes to this, therefore, that Sunday laws are a direct invasion of the rights of conscience.

More than this, Sunday laws are a direct invasion not only of the Constitutional right, but the inalienable right, of acquiring possessing, and protecting property. I here adopt the language of the Supreme Court of California,—language which can never be successfully controverted:—

> The right to protect and possess property is not more clearly protected by the Constitution than the right to acquire. The right to acquire must include the right to use the proper means to attain the end. The right itself would be impotent without the power to use the necessary incidents. If the legislature have the authority to appoint a time of compulsory rest, ... it is without limit, and may extend to the prohibition of all occupations at all times... For the Constitution to declare a right inalienable and at the same time leave the legislature unlimited power over it, would be a contradiction in terms, an idle provision, proving that a Constitution was a mere parchment barrier, insufficient to protect the citizen, delusive and visionary, and the practical result of which would be to destroy, [143] not conserve, the rights which they may assume to protect. The legislature, therefore, cannot prohibit the proper use of the means of acquiring property, except the peace and safety of the State require it.—*Ex parte Newman, 9 Cal., pp. 517,510.*

But does the peace and safety of the State require it in any such case as is here involved? Can it ever be against the peace and safety of the State for any man to follow his honest, legitimate, and even laudable occupations? It is against the peace and safety of the State to *prohibit* it.

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For, as I have before conclusively proved, for the State to do so is for it to put honest occupations in the catalogue of crimes; to put peaceable and industrious citizens upon a level with criminals; and to put a premium upon idleness and recklessness. It is certainly against the peace and safety of any State to do any such thing. Therefore it is demonstrated that Sunday laws are an invasion of the inalienable right of acquiring and possessing property, and for that man in Arkansas to have obeyed that law, would have been to surrender his inalienable right.

Once more: As the right to acquire property includes the right to use the proper means to attain that end, and as such a law deprives a man of the use of such means during one-sixth of his time, it follows that it is a violation of that provision of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, which declares that "no State shall deprive any citizen of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law."

All this, sir, is involved in the question as to whether that man shall recognize the law to such an extent as even to pay the fine. If he does, then it follows inevitably that all his property shall go to pay fines, or else he must choose between yielding his rights of conscience, and allowing one-sixth of his time to be confiscated, and in that a certain proportion of property; [144] because to the industrious citizen, time is property. But if the State by a Sunday law or by any other means, may confiscate a part, it may confiscate all. Where, then, shall resistance to oppression begin?—I say, At the very first appearance of it. Under cover of the word "*Loan*" Charles I. undertook to confiscate a small sum of money from each of the property owners of England. John Hampden's share was about seven dollars and seventy-five cents. He was a rich man, but he refused to pay it; and his refusal to pay that paltry sum led to all England's being plunged into confusion and civil war: the king lost his head, Hampden himself lost his life, and all this rather than to pay the insignificant sum of seven dollars and seventy-five cents!—less than one-third of the fine imposed upon this man for refusing to assent to the confiscation of one-sixth of his property. But John Hampden's refusal to pay that money established the Constitutional principle that every man has the inalienable right to acquire, possess, and protect property—a right

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which was invaded in this case. Upon this principle alone that man was entirely justified in refusing to pay the fine imposed by that Sunday law. But as there was also involved the inalienable right of conscience, he was doubly justified in refusing to obey the law or to recognize the principle.

Senator Blair.—Suppose he was a guilty man. Suppose he did not believe it was an offense to steal, and that he conscientiously thought that he could take goods from another in a certain way. He had been convicted under the law, and was under the penalty of paying twenty-five dollars' fine. Is he to put his right of conscience against the demands of wife and child, and against the judgment of the community, and the State in which he lives, and to which he owes all the rights to the enjoyment of property, and everything [145] else he has? In this case a man saw all this evil done rather than pay twenty-five or fifty dollars, and he says he did that by reason of his conscience.

Mr. Jones.—The cases are not parallel at all, unless indeed you count it as much of a crime for a man to follow his honest occupation as it is for him to steal. This, however, we have demonstrated is the very thing that Sunday laws do. But we forever protest against honesty industry's being put upon a level with thieving.

The man who steals takes the property of others without compensation and without regard to the question of right. If, then, the State takes from him property or time without compensation, he cannot complain of injustice. But in the case of the man who works on Sunday, he invades no man's right in any degree; he takes no man's property or his time in any way, much less does he take it without compensation. For the State to punish the thief, is just. For the State to punish the industrious citizen, is pre-eminently unjust.

But aside from all this, did you ever hear of a man whose conscience taught him that it was right to steal, that it was a conscientious conviction to steal?

Senator Blair.—I have heard of great many instances where an individual confessed that he had conscientiously violated the law, yet he was punished.

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Mr. Jones.—Precisely; and the Christians were put to death under the Roman empire for violating the law.

Senator Blair.—But that does not answer my question, and it is not necessary that it should be answered.

Mr. Jones.—It is right for any man to violate any law that invades his Constitutional rights; and it is his right conscientiously to violate any law that invades the rights of conscience. God declares the man innocent who violates the law that interferes with man's relationship to God—the law that invades the rights of conscience. See cases "The King *vs.* Shadrach, Meshach [146] and Abed-nego;" and "The State *vs.* Daniel," reported in Daniel chapters 3, 6.

The end of the Arkansas case, as reported by Senator Crockett, was that the poor man lost both his wife and his child.

Senator Blair.—What became of him?

Mr. Jones.—He left the State.

Senator Blair.—I should think he ought to leave it.

Mr. Jones.—So do I, sir. But what can be said of freedom any more in this country, when such things can be? That is also true of six other men who followed the dictates of their own consciences,—as good, honest, virtuous citizens, as lived in Arkansas.

Senator Blair.—There is a good deal of humbug about the dictates of one's own conscience. If a man is to set up his conscience against the obligations to do what is right and to perform his duty toward society, an unintelligent and uninformed conscience of that kind might be allowed to destroy all society. It is not conscience always.

Mr. Jones.—I beg your pardon, sir. The rights of conscience are eternally sacred. There is no conscience in regard to the State, however; conscience has to do with God, and with what he has commanded; and a man reads in the Bible what God commands. I here adopt the words of the present Associate-justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, Hon. Stanley Matthews, in his speech in the case of the Cincinnati School Board *vs.* Minor *et al.* He says:—

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> We may call the eccentricities of conscience, vagaries, if we please; but in matters of religious concern we have no right to disregard or despise them, no matter how trivial and absurd we may conceive them to be. In the days of the early Christian martyrs, the Roman lictors and soldiers despised and ridiculed the fanaticism that refused the trifling conformity of a pinch of incense [147] upon the altar, erected to the Caesar that arrogated to himself the title and honor of 'divine,' or a heathen statue. History is filled with the record of bloody sacrifices which holy men who feared God rather than men, have not withheld, on account of what seemed to cruel persecutors but trifling observances and concessions.... Conscience, if your honors please, is a tender thing, and tenderly to be regarded; and in the same proportion in which a man treasures his own moral integrity,—sets up the light of conscience within him as the glory of God shining in him to discover to him the truth,—so ought he to regard the conscience of every other man, and apply the cardinal maxim of Christian life and practice, 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so unto them.'

Senator Blair.—Should those who conscientiously believe in free love be allowed to indulge in it?

Mr. Jones.—There is no point in that. Where is there any conscientious conviction in free love? I cannot discover it. There is no room for any.

Senator Blair.—But there must be laws which prohibit immorality?

Mr. Jones.—I ask you to define what immorality is, and then I will answer your question.

Senator Blair.—If you do not know what the expression means, I shall not undertake to enlighten you.

Mr. Jones.—I know what it means.

Senator Blair.—Then why do you ask me to define it? Why do you not answer the question?

Mr. Jones.—Because there are modified meanings of the word which make it refer to crime. Immorality is itself a violation of the law of God, and civil government has no right to punish any man for a violation of the law of God as such. I do say, therefore, that that which, properly

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speaking, is immorality, the civil law cannot prohibit, and that it has no right to attempt it. Morality is defined as follows:— [148]

> *Morality:* The relation of conformity or non-conformity to the true moral standard or rule.... The conformity of an act to the divine law.

As morality is the conformity of an act to the divine law, it is plain that morality pertains solely to God, and with that, civil government can have nothing to do.

Again: Moral law is defined as—

> "The will of God, as the supreme moral ruler, concerning the character and conduct of all responsible beings; the rule of action as obligatory on the conscience or moral nature." The moral law is summarily contained in the decalogue, written by the finger of God on two tables of stone, and delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai."

These definitions are evidently according to Scripture. The Scriptures show that the ten commandments are the law of God; that they express the will of God; that they pertain to the conscience, and take cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart; and that obedience to these commandments is the duty that man owes to God. Says the Scripture,—

> Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. Ecclesiastes 12:13.

And the Saviour says,—

> Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment; but I say unto you that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca [vain fellow, *margin*], shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Matthew 5:21, 22.

The apostle John, referring to the same thing, says,—

> Whosoever hateth his brother is murderer. 1 John 3: [149]

Again, the Saviour says,—

> Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you that whosoever looketh on a

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> woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. Matthew 5:27, 28.

Other illustrations might be given, but these are sufficient to show that obedience to the moral law is morality; that it pertains to the thoughts and intents of the heart, and therefore, in the very nature of the case, lies beyond the reach or control of the civil power. To hate is murder; to covet is idolatry; to think impurely of a woman is adultery;—these are all equally immoral, and violations of the moral law, but no civil government seeks to punish for them. A man may hate his neighbor all his life; he may covet everything on earth; he may think impurely of every woman that he sees,—he may keep it up all his days; but so long as these things are confined to his thought, the civil power cannot touch him. It would be difficult to conceive of a more immoral person than such a man would be; yet the State cannot punish him. It does not attempt to punish him. This demonstrates again that with morality or immorality the State can have nothing to do.

But let us carry this further. Only let that man's hatred lead him, either by word or sign, to attempt an injury to his neighbor, and the State will punish him; only let his covetousness lead him to lay hands on what is not his own, in an attempt to steal, and the State will punish him; only let his impure thought lead him to attempt violence to any woman, and the State will punish him. Yet bear in mind that even then the States does not punish him for his immorality, but for his *incivility.* The immorality lies in the heart, and can be measured by God only. The State punishes no man because he is immoral. If it did, it would have to punish as a murderer [150] the man who hates another, and to punish as an idolater the man who covets, and to punish as an adulterer the one who thinks impurely; because according to the true standard of morality, hatred is murder, covetousness is idolatry, and impurity of thought is adultery. Therefore is clear that in fact the State punishes no man because he is immoral, but because he is uncivil. It cannot punish immorality; it must punish incivility.

This distinction is shown in the very term by which is designated State or national government; it is called *civil* government. No person but a theocrat ever thinks of calling it moral government. The government of God is the only moral government. God is the only moral governor. The

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law of God is the only moral law. To God alone pertains the punishment of immorality, which is the transgression of the moral law. Governments of men are civil governments, not moral. The laws of States and nations are civil laws, not moral. To the authorities of civil government pertains the punishment of incivility, that is, the transgression of civil law. It is not theirs to punish immorality. That pertains solely to the Author of the moral law and of the moral sense, who is the sole judge of man's moral relation. All this must be manifest to every one who will think fairly upon the subject, and it is confirmed by the definition of the word *civil*, which is this:—

> Civil: Pertaining to a city or State, or to a citizen in his relations to his fellow-citizens, or to the State.

Thus it is made clear that we owe to Caesar (civil government) only that which is civil, and that we owe to God that which is moral or religious, and that to no man. to no assembly or organization of men, does there belong any right whatever to punish immorality. Whoever attempts, it, usurps the prerogative of God. The [151] Inquisition is the inevitable logic of any claim of any assembly of men to punish immorality; because to punish immorality, it is necessary in some way to get at the thoughts and intents of the heart. The papacy, asserting the right to compel men to be moral, and to punish them for immorality, had the cruel courage to carry the evil principle to its logical consequence. In carrying out the principle, it was found to be essential to get at the secrets of men's hearts; and it was found that the diligent application of torture would wring from men, in many cases, a full confession of the most secret counsels of their hearts. Hence the Inquisition was established as the means best adapted to secure the desired end. So long as men grant the proposition that it is within the province of civil government to enforce morality, it is to very little purpose that they condemn the Inquisition; for that tribunal is only the logical result of the proposition.

Thus much on the subject of morality and the State in the true and genuine sense of the word *morality*. But as I said at the beginning, there is an accommodated sense in which the word *morality* is used, in which it is made to refer only to men's relations to their fellow-men; and with reference to this view of morality, it is sometimes said that the civil

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power is to enforce morality *upon a civil basis.* But morality on a civil basis is only civility, and the enforcement of morality upon a civil basis is the enforcement of civility, and nothing else. Without the Inquisition, it is impossible for civil government ever to carry its jurisdiction beyond civil things, or to enforce anything but civility.

But it may be asked, Does not the civil power enforce the observance of the commandments of God, which say, "Thou shalt not steal." "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and "Thou shalt not bear false witness"? Does not the civil [152] power punish the violation of these commandments of God? I answer: The civil power does not enforce these, nor does it punish the violation of them, *as commandments of God.* The State does forbid murder and theft and perjury, and some States forbid adultery, but not as commandments of God. From time immemorial, governments that knew nothing about God, have forbidden these things. If the State is to enforce these things as the commandments of God, it will have to take cognizance of the thoughts and intents of the heart; but this is not within the province of any earthly power.

By all these evidences is established the plain, common-sense principle that to civil government pertains only that which the term itself implies,—that which is civil. The purpose of civil government is civil, and not moral. Its function is to preserve order in society, and to cause all its subjects to rest in assured safety, by guarding them against all incivility. Morality belongs to God; civility, to the State. Morality must be rendered to God; civility, to the State. Immorality must be punished—*can* be punished—only by the Lord. Incivility must be punished—and no more than that *can* possibly be punished—by the State.

Here, then at the close of my remarks, we are brought to the enunciation of the eternal principle with which I began, upon which we now stand, and upon which we forever expect to stand,—the principle embodied in the United States Constitution forbidding religious tests, and forbidding Congress to make any law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,—the principle established by Jesus Christ: *Render therefore* UNTO CAESAR *the things which are* CAESAR'S; *and* UNTO GOD THE THINGS THAT ARE GOD'S. [153]

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REMARKS BY REV. A. II. LEWIS, D. D

Dr. Lewis.—Mr. Chairman. The objection raised by Prof. Jones against the exemption in favor of Sabbath-keepers, seems to me wholly imaginary. So far as any Seventh-day Baptists are concerned, I know it would be impossible for any man opening a saloon on Sunday to present the excuse that he was a Seventh-day Baptist. A saloon-keeping Seventh-day Baptist is an unknown thing throughout their history of more than two centuries. Such a man could not obtain recognition, much less church membership, in any Seventh-day Baptist community or church. Nor do I believe from what I know of the Seventh-day Adventists, that such a case could occur in connection with that people. The possibility of any such deceitful claim could easily be guarded against by a provision requiring that in any case of doubt the one claiming to have observed the seventh day should be required to bring official certificate of his relation to a Sabbath-keeping church. Such a provision would end all difficulty.

REPLY

Mr. Jones.—Mr. Chairman. It is certainly true that, so far, a saloon-keeping Seventh-day Baptist, or Seventh-day Adventist, either, is an unknown thing. But if Sunday laws are enforced with an exemption clause in favor of those who keep the seventh day, this would not be an unknown thing much longer. It is true, also, that such a man could not obtain membership in any Seventh-day Baptist or Seventh-day Adventist church. But what is to prevent the saloon keepers from organizing Seventh-day Baptist or Seventh-day Adventist churches of their own, and for themselves? What is to prevent them, or any class of business men, from organizing their own churches, electing their own officers, and even ordaining their own pastors, and calling themselves [154] Seventh-day Baptists or Seventh-day Adventists? There is nothing to prevent it unless, indeed, the State itself shall take charge of all seventh-day churches and doctrines, and attend to their organization and the admission of members. This is precisely what was done before. In the days of the New England theocracy, Massachusetts enacted a law that,—

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> For the time to come, no man shall be admitted to the freedom of this body politic, but such as are members of some of the churches within the limits of the same.

There were considerable numbers of men who were not members of any of the churches, and who could not be, because they were not Christians. These men then took to forming themselves into churches of their own. Then the next step for the authorities to take, and they took it, was to enact a law that,—

> Forasmuch as it hath bene found by sad experience that much trouble and disturbance hath happened both to the church and civil State by the officers and members of some churches, wch have bene gathered ... in an undue manner, ... it is ... ordered that ... this Court doeth not, nor will hereafter, approue of any such companyes of men as shall henceforthe ioyne in any pretended way of church fellowshipp, without they shall first acquainte the magistrates and elders of the greatr pte of the churches fellowshipp, without their intencons, and have their approbacon herein.—*Emancipation of Massachusetts, pp. 28-30.*

By this, gentlemen, you will see that the enactment of this Sunday law, though the first step, will not be by any means the last step, and that in more directions than one. Their offer of an exemption clause is a voluntary confession that the enforcement of the law without one would be unjust; but if that exemption clause be embodied and maintained, the State is [155] inevitably carried beyond its proper jurisdiction; and if the exemption clause is retained and not maintained in its strictness, the whole law is at once nullified. Congress would better learn wisdom from this prospect, and utterly refuse to have anything at all to do with the subject. The whole subject is beyond the jurisdiction of the civil power, and the civil power can do no better than to let it entirely alone.

But Dr. Lewis proposes to guard against all difficulty, by "requiring" every observer of the seventh day "to bring official certificate of his relation to a Sabbath-keeping church." This would not end the difficulty; for, as I have shown, it would inevitably devolve upon the State to decide what was a genuine Sabbath-keeping church. But that is not the worst feature in this suggestion. If Dr. Lewis officially represents the Seventh-day Baptist

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denomination, and for the denomination proposes thus voluntarily to put himself and all his people on "ticket of leave," I have no particular objection; that is their own business; yet it seems to me an extremely generous proposition, if not an extraordinary proceeding. I say *they* may do this, if they choose. But as for me and for the Seventh-day Adventists generally, not only as Christians, but as American citizens, we repudiate with scorn and reject with utter contempt every principle of any such suggestion. As citizens of the United States, and as Christians, we utterly and forever refuse to put ourselves upon "ticket of leave" by any such proposition.

NOTE.—That my argument at first was not so unfounded nor so "wholly imaginary" as Dr. Lewis supposed, has been conclusively demonstrated, even to himself, since this hearing was held. The "Pearl of [156] Days" column of the New York *Mail and Express,* the official organ of the American Sunday Union, in March, 1889, grave the following statement from the Plainfield [N. J.] *Times* [no date]:—

> As a rule, Plainfield, N. J., is a very quiet city on Sunday. Liquor, provision, and cigar stores are closed by the enforcement of a city ordinance. If a resident wants a cigar, he will either have it given to him by one of the many pharmacists who refuse to sell on Sunday, or he will go to the two dealers who are allowed to open their places on Sunday because they observe Saturday as their Sabbath. Some time ago a man of Catholic faith, who had an eye to Sunday business in that line, became a regular attendant at the Seventh-day Baptist church. Eventually he asked to be admitted into the fellowship of the church. A member of the official board was advised that the applicant for membership was only working for business ends. He was closely examined by the church officers, and he finally admitted that he wanted to open a cigar store and do business on Sunday. The man appeared at the wrong place for aid in carrying out his mercenary purposes. He was not received into membership.

It looks somewhat like the "irony of fate" that this thing should fall to they very people whom Dr. Lewis represented, and in the very town where Dr. Lewis himself lives.

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REMARKS BY MRS. J. C. BATEHAM

Mrs. Bateham.—I should like to say that the point which has been made was a point carefully considered by the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and we saw the danger. Yet we wished to be exceedingly fair. I consulted nine persons of different classes of Seventh-day people, to know whether they wished such an exemption, and whether they would be satisfied with what was proposed. They represented themselves as being in approval of some such provision as has been suggested, [157] and we thought it could be done perhaps in such a way as to afford them the exemption which they desire, because they said that such an exemption is necessary.

Senator Blair.—Let me ask you a few questions, Mrs. Bateham, to see if the Woman's Christian Temperance Union understood exactly the relation of what they propose to do in this legislation. Here is a bill which relates to interstate commerce, to postal work, to the army, and to the navy. It relates to that subject-matter which is carved out of the independent, full jurisdiction of a nation by the States, which were once complete sovereignties, and transferred to the general Government. The occupations I have mentioned are all of public nature; and to carry them on, the nation has such an opportunity to invade the Sabbath-rest laws of every State in such a way as to nullify them. The nation at large is unrestrained by any Sabbath law whatever. If it may carry on its post-office business on the Sabbath, it may go to any extent, and it does go already to a very great extent, and an increasingly great extent; so in regard to interstate commerce, and so with the army and the navy.

Now, you go to our Seventh-day Baptist or Seventh-day Adventist friends, for instance, and propose to introduce a principle by which they can carry on the post-office department on the Sabbath, just as completely as they see fit. In other words, you propose to exempt them from the operation of the law so far as it prohibits post-office work on the Sabbath. Suppose you have a Seventh-day Baptist man for postmaster. Suppose you fill up every post-office in the country on the Sabbath with Seventh-day Baptist people. You have the post-office department in operation by virtue of this exemption, because they can do the work conscientiously on that

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day. If you limit it by saying the [158] bill shall not apply to the Adventists and others, the bill provides that already.

Mrs. Bateham.—If you remember the clause, we do not propose to provide that they shall be able to do this work, but that they shall be exempt from the penalty. They are not allowed to do the work, but they are to be exempt from the penalty. Therefore, unless they could prove that they had not done the work to the disturbance of others, it would be impossible for them to carry on post-office matters, for instance, or any other public employment, on Sunday.

Senator Blair.—Is not that equivalent to saying that if the penalty shall not be enforced against them, there shall be no law against them? Because the law without the penalty is simply an opinion; it is not a law.

Mrs. Bateham.—The law could provide that they should not open a post-office, for instance, or any place of business; and if there was a fine imposed, they would be compelled to close such places on Sunday. It was, of course, only thrown out as a suggestion from us that if it could be done, we should like to have such a provision in the bill. We are satisfied that people want the law, and if the law can, in your wisdom, be arranged with such an exemption, then we wish it; otherwise we do not. We are all glad, I think, to have the gentlemen admit that they do not want such an exemption, for that releases us from the place where we were.

Senator Blair.—This is not to be a general Sunday law. These people all live in States, and they can work at their private occupations just the same under similar amendments to the State law, if the State saw fit to make such amendments. Prof. Jones says it did not work well in Arkansas, and I should think it did not, from his description. But these are public occupations, or *quasi* public occupations, we are dealing with; that of interstate commerce, for instance, carried on by [159] great corporations which are public in their relation to the working-men, because they are exercising a great public function in carrying on transportation which appertains to everybody all over the country.

This proposed law undertakes to prohibit the nullification of all Sunday-rest laws in the States so far as to provide that interstate commerce

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shall not be carried on, in violation of the law, upon the Sabbath. When you come to the private occupations which are regulated by the States, if they choose to allow the Seventh-day Baptist people to work on Sunday in those private occupations, on the farm, in the workshop, in the factory, this measure does not interfere with them at all.

Mr. Bateham.—I have not the words before me, but my impression is that there is a clause in the bill providing that the jurisdiction of Congress shall be exercised over the Territories in this matter. There is something of that kind in the bill, and this proposed exemption was designed to reach those cases, rather than apply to the general governmental action.

Senator Blair.—You think the exemption might be made with reference to the Territories?

Mrs. Bateham.—Yes; that was the point we had in mind in this general action. I have not the words of the bill before me, but there is something of that kind in it which we had in mind. I wish to say also that one of the requests of our National Woman's Christian Union was that the word *promote* should be changed to *protect,* in the title of the bill, so that it should have no appearance of what all Americans object to, any union of church and state. That amendment was proposed and accepted by the American Sabbath Union, the organized body which has just been in session in this city.

Senator Blair.—Do you not think that the word *protect* implies power to command and compel? An army protects. [160]

Mrs. Bateham.—All our laws protect us, do they not?

Senator Blair.—You would make this a law?

Mrs. Bateham.—I suggest that the bill be made a law, and that it be a law which shall protect the civil Sabbath, not promote religious worship, but protect the day as a day of rest and religious worship.

Senator Blair.—It seems to me that the word *protect* is a stronger and more interfering word than *promote.* However, all these suggestions are important.

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REPLY

Mr. Jones.—Mr. Chairman. Mrs. Bateham in her first address this morning, in telling who they are that are in favor of this Sunday law, said that she believed "the great majority of the people will approve such a law." She mentioned as opposed to it only "the daily newspaper press," the railroad managers," "steamboat companies," "saloonists and their backers," "a class of foreigners who prefer the continental Sunday," and "the very small sect of Seventh-day Baptists."

Hon. G. P. Lord in his remarks said that "not more than three million of our population work on Sabbath, and most of this number are unwilling workers." He said that "the balance, or more than fifty-seven million of our population, abstain from toil on the Sabbath."

Taking these statements as the truth, it appears that the overwhelming majority of the American people are not only in favor of the Sunday law, but they actually keep that day as a rest day.

Now, gentlemen, is it not rather singular, and a doctrine altogether new in a government of the people, that the *majority* need to be *protected*? From whom are they to be protected?—From themselves, most assuredly, because by their own representation they are so vastly in the majority that it would be impossible for [161] them to be oppressed by anybody else. But in a government of the people, when the majority are oppressing themselves, how can laws prevent it when the laws must be made by the majority, that is, by the very ones who are carrying on the oppression? If to them my argument seems unsound, I would cite, entirely for their benefit, the words of the Supreme Court of Ohio, that the "protection" guaranteed in our Constitutional provisions

> means protection to the minority. The majority can protect itself. Constitutions are enacted for the purpose of protecting the weak against the strong, the few against the many.

This is sound sense, as well as sound Constitutional law. Now, suppose in accordance with this sound Constitutional principle, and under cover of their own statements, we, seventh-day observers, whom they themselves designate as being so entirely in the minority as scarcely to be worthy of

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recognition,—suppose we should come to Congress asking for protection (and as all my argument has shown, if anybody needs protection in this matter, assuredly it is ourselves),—suppose, then, we come to Congress asking for protection in the same way that *they* ask for it,—suppose we should ask Congress to enact a law compelling all people to do no work on Saturday, in order to protect us in our right to keep Saturday; what would be thought of that? what would these people themselves think of it? what ought anybody to think of it, but that it was a piece of unwarranted assumption of authority to force upon others our ideas of religious observances? That is all it would be, and it would be utterly inexcusable. And I risk nothing in saying that these people themselves, as well as everybody else, would pronounce it unwarrantable and inexcusable. But if that would be so in the case of a minority who actually need to be protected, what, then, ought *not* to be thought of these people [162] who claim to be in the overwhelming majority, in their mission here, asking Congress to compel everybody to rest on Sunday for *their* protection!

Gentlemen, it is not protection, but *power,* that they want.

REMARKS BY JOHN B. WOOD

Mr. Wood.—Mr. Chairman. As a member of the society of Friends, a Quaker, I should like to say a few words.

I have a great deal of sympathy with people who talk about the right of conscience. I do not think the United States Government has any right over the conscience. We, as Friends, deny their right over our consciences while we act in accordance with the revealed will of God, the Bible.

In looking at this Sunday question, I see nothing in the Bible—there is no word in it—in which it is stated that we shall have to work on the first day of the week. Therefore, I do not think the Seventh-day Baptists have any right to object to the proposed legislation. The only thing they lose is one more day's work out of the week.

The society of Friends has always denied the right to fight. The result has been that in the United States they have never lost a life by

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that means, not even during the last war. The Lord Jesus Christ has always protected them.

I think that any Saturday Baptist who believes honestly that the Sabbath is Saturday, can depend upon the Lord's providing for him in five days of the week just as well as if he worked six, and he will have two Sundays instead of one, and be that much better off. [163]

REPLY

Mr. Jones.—In answer to the question raised by Mr. Wood, that conscientious convictions do not require us to work on the first day of the week, one of the six working days, I wish to say,—

First, we deny his right, as well as the right of the State, to assume the prerogative of deciding for us what the Bible teaches, or what our conscientious convictions do, or do not, require.

Secondly, we deny the right of the State to cause us to lose the whole, or any part, of a day's work out of every week. And I turn this point upon him as I turned it upon the others, Why have we not as much right to ask for a law compelling them to rest on the day that we keep, as they have to compel us to rest on the day which they keep? "The only thing they would lose is one more day's work out of the week." Then they could "have two Sundays instead of one, and be that much better off." Why is it not as good for them as it is for us? Or is this a benefit reserved solely for those who do *not* keep Sunday? How this invades the Constitutional right of acquiring and possessing property, and does deprive us of property without due process of law, I have already discussed.

Thirdly, upon this point I wish to read Judge Cooley's opinion.

Mr. Wood.—I referred to the Bible.

Mr. Jones.—The Bible says, "Six days shalt thou labor." While I do not insist that this is an absolute command that we shall actually work the whole six days, I do insist that it is a God-given permission, and therefore our God-given right, to work six days of every week. And we deny forever

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the right of the State to forbid us to do that which, to say the very least, God has given us the express right to do. [164]

As this is a matter of legislation and therefore of law, Judge Cooley's opinion is of weight upon the subject. He says:—

> The Jew [and the seventh-day Christian as well] who is forced to respect the first day of the week, when his conscience requires of him the observance of the seventh also, may plausibly urge that the law discriminates against his religion, and by forcing him to keep a second Sabbath in each week, *unjustly,* though by indirection, *punishes him for his belief.*

I have shown—

Senator Blair.—He says "plausibly." That word *plausibly* indicates that there are some counter views somewhere.

Mr. Jones.—As to the exact sense in which he uses the word *plausibly,* of course we cannot tell without consulting Mr. Cooley himself; but I do not see why we should put the strongest meaning into the word, especially as farther on he shows that the argument of the Seventh-day keeper is unanswerable. I am inclined to think that the Judge uses the word there in the sense of fairly, rightly, or feasibly.

Next he says:—

> The laws which prohibit ordinary employments on Sunday are to be defendant, either on the same grounds which justify the punishment of profanity, or as establishing sanitary regulations based upon the demonstration of experience that one day's rest in seven is needful to recuperate the exhausted energies of body and mind.

That is one of the pretended grounds of this petition for this national Sunday law; but the answer of the Supreme Court of California to that is this:—

> This argument is founded on the assumption that mankind are in the habit of working too much, and thereby entailing evil upon society; and that, without [165] compulsion, they will not seek the necessary repose which their exhausted natures demand. This is to us a new theory, and is contradicted by the history of the past and the observations of the present. We have heard in all ages of declamations and reproaches against the vice of indolence; but we have yet to learn

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> that there has ever been any general complaint of an intemperate, vicious, unhealthy, or morbid industry. On the contrary, we know that mankind seek cessation from toil, from the natural influences of self-preservation, in the same manner and as certainly as they seek slumber, relief from pain, or food to appease their hunger.... If we cannot trust free agents to regulate their own labor, its times and quantity, it is difficult to trust them to make their own contracts. If the legislature could prescribe the days of rest for them, then it would seem that the same power could prescribe the hours to work, rest, and eat. —*Ex parte Newman, 9 Cal. 509, 518.*

And Judge Cooley's answer to it is this:—

> The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania have preferred to defend such legislation on the second ground rather than the first, but it appears to us that if the benefit of the individual is alone to be considered, the argument against the law which he may make who has already observed the seventh day of the week, is unanswerable.

Senator Blair.—But he also holds that for the general, the public good, Sunday laws are Constitutional.

Mr. Jones.—Yes; and to be sustained upon authority. For the next sentence says:—

> But on the other ground, it is clear that these laws are supportable on authority, notwithstanding the inconvenience which they occasion to those whose religious sentiments do not recognize the sacred character of the first day of the week.

It is something unusual for persons to undertake to answer an unanswerable argument. But Judge Cooley employs here the only means by which an unanswerable [166] argument can ever be answered: and that is, "on authority." That is the way the papacy has done it from the days of Pope Zosimus, A. D., 418, who, when asked for the reasons for certain of this arrogant actions, exclaimed: "So it has pleased the Apostolic See!" That was a sufficient answer to all inquiries, and even to unanswerable arguments.

England fastened upon the American colonies the Stamp Act. Our fathers presented unanswerable arguments against it; but the Stamp Act, like Judge Cooley's Constitutional Sunday laws, was supportable "on authority," and that was enough. England proposed to enforce it. But our revolutionary fathers refused assent to any such method of answering

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unanswerable arguments. So we refuse our assent to Mr. Cooley's answer to that which he himself pronounces an unanswerable argument.

Senator Blair.—It does not follow that there is no unanswerable argument in support of Sunday laws, I take it.

Mr. Jones.—There is the authority.

Senator Blair.—There is authority for the Sunday laws. It does not follow because the Sunday laws are supported by authority that therefore there is no sufficient argument upon which to base them.

Mr. Jones.—What authority is there for Sunday laws?

Senator Blair.—That is what you have been discussing; but you seem to say that because Sunday laws are supported "by authority," it is the only argument in favor of a bad law that there is authority for it. But there may be good authority for the Sunday law.

Mr. Jones.—That is what is shown here, that there is no good authority for it when it unjustly punishes a man for his belief. There cannot be any good authority [167] for unjustly punishing any man for anything, much less for unjustly punishing him for his belief.

Senator Blair.—He does not say it is bad.

Mr. Jones.—But it *is* bad. Is there any good answer to an unanswerable argument?

Now, I propose to find out what authority there is for Sunday laws.

I before referred to the decision of the Supreme Court of Arkansas, and have shown from a statement of the committee on "law and law reform," of which the members of the Supreme Court were members, that decision was unconstitutional. I have shown that the principle upon which their decision rested was that of the omnipotence of parliament. In this, however, the State of Arkansas only followed the decisions of other States. In 1858, the Constitution of California said, in Section 4: "The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship without discrimination or preference shall forever be allowed in this State." There was a statute passed by the legislature enforcing the observance of "the Christian Sabbath," on the first day of the week. A Jew in Sacramento kept his store

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open on Sunday; he was arrested, convicted, and sent to jail. He sued out a writ of *habeas corpus* on the ground of "the illegality of his imprisonment by reason of the unconstitutionality of the law." The majority of the court sustained the plea by decisions separately written, whose soundness, both upon Constitutional principles and upon the abstract principle of justice itself, can never be successfully controverted. Mr. Stephen J. Field, now Associate-Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, was then a member of the California Court. He rendered a dissenting opinion, taking the same position as the Supreme Court of Arkansas as to the omnipotence of the legislature, and soberly maintaining that the term "Christian [168] Sabbath" in the act was not a discrimination or preference in favor of any religious profession or worship. He declared that "moralists and statesmen," "men of science and distinguished philosophers," have pronounced the rule of "one day's rest in seven" to be "founded upon a law of our race." But he omitted to state what scientist or philosopher or moralist or statesman has ever pronounced upon what law is founded the rule of *two* days' rest in seven for the man who chooses to rest some other day than Sunday!

In his written opinion, Mr. Field said that he had found that in twenty-five States of the Union, Sunday laws had been held to be Constitutional. That this is so there can be no doubt. On this subject, as on that of blasphemy, which I have already noticed, the younger States, both in legislation and judicial decisions, have followed the example of the older States; these have followed the decisions of the oldest, and the oldest followed the example and the precedents of the colonies; and every one of the colonies had Sunday laws because every one had an established religions. These followed the precedents of the English system, which is wholly a church-and-state system. The church-and-state system of England severed itself from the papal rule when Henry VIII. renounced allegiance to the pope, and put himself at the head of the church of England in the place of the pope. The British system at that time was the papal system; the papal system was established by the mutual craft, flattery, and policy of Constantine and the ambitious bishops of his time, when the first Sunday law was enacted. This, in a word, is the genealogy of the Sunday laws of the United States. They belong with an established religion,—a union of church

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and state. And in this country they have been almost universally sustained, either upon the British principle of the omnipotence of parliament, [169] or upon the church and state principles of the colonies, of the British government, and of the papacy.

The law of Pennsylvania, sustained by the decision referred to by Judge Cooley, was virtually a colonial law, which was a part of the system in which nobody who did "not confess and acknowledge one Almighty God to be the Creator, upholder, and ruler of the world," could be a citizen.

The Supreme Court of New York sustains Sunday laws by at once declaring Christianity to be the established religion of that State. This is based upon Chief Justice Kent's decision before referred to, which cited a law of the colony which declared that "the profanation of the Lord's day was 'the great scandal of the Christian faith.'" That decision of Judge Kent's made Christianity the established religion of the State of New York, by citing the precedents of the papal institutions of modern Europe and the pagan nations of antiquity.

This, again, proves Sunday laws to belong with established religions, with the union of church and state, finding their basis in papal and pagan institutions.

In every statute book in America, with scarcely an exception, Sunday laws are found under the head of "offenses against religion," This springs naturally from the colonial legislation, where each colony deemed itself the special guardian of God and of some particular form of religion.

But according to the word of Christ, the civil power has nothing to do with either God or religion, nor with offenses against God or religion. Religion is defined by Webster as "the recognition of God as an object of worship, love, and obedience." Another definition, given by the National Reform Association itself, is "man's personal relation of faith and obedience to God." Civil government has nothing to do with a man's personal [170] relation of faith and obedience to God. If he has no faith at all, and makes no pretensions to obedience to God, that is nothing to the civil government, so long as the man conducts himself civilly. Neither has civil government anything to do with offenses against God; the Lord himself can attend to

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that. A man is responsible alone to God for the offenses which he commits against God. Civil government has no business to establish a religion, and then make offenses against it criminal; nor has it any business to put itself in the place of God, and presume to declare that an offense against *the governmental idea of God* is an offense against God. How is the civil government to know whether an act offends God or not? The fact of the matter is, that just as soon as Sunday laws are investigated at all in the light of truth, or justice, or law it is found that they are inseparable from an established religion,—inseparable from a union of church and state.

This is further shown by a mere glance at the British system, as set forth by Blackstone in his chapter on "Offenses against God and religion." There "profanation of the Lord's day" is classed with such things as "apostasy,""heresy,""reviling the ordinances of the church,""non-conformity to the worship of the church," "witchcraft," "conjuration," "enchantment," "sorcery," "religious imposture, such as falsely pretending an extraordinary commission from heaven," adultery as an ecclesiastical offense cognizable by the spiritual court, and such confusion of civil and religious ideas as the punishment of drunkenness as an offense against God and religion. This is the company with which Sunday laws belong. The penalty for apostasy was, first, burning to death; this fell into disuse after a while. Then the penalty was that "for [171] the first offense the offender should be rendered incapable to hold any office or place of trust."

At such legal nonsense as this the United States Constitution struck a death blow in the clause which declares that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under this Government." And by the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States, this Government utterly separated itself from the whole system of offenses against God and religion so long maintained by the British government, by the colonies, and even yet by many of the States, and which is characteristic of all church-and-state governments—governments of established religion—by declaring that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This is sound American principle, and accords with the word of Jesus Christ. And the effort ought to be, throughout this whole nation, to

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lift the constitutions, the legislation, and the jurisprudence of the States up to the level of that of the national Constitution. But instead of doing that, and so carrying this whole nation bodily onward in the march of liberty, enlightenment, and progress, these people go about to bring down our national system of Constitution and laws to the level of that of the States, which is the level of that of the colonies, which is the level of that of the British system, which is the level that of the papacy, which is the system of paganism under cover of the Christian name.

Dr. Elliott here to-day cited Edgar, Athelstan, and Alfred in support of Sunday laws. To be sure! And with equal force he can cite these and many others of the Dark Ages in support of tithes to the clergy, the supremacy of the monks in civil affairs, the "holy anointing" of kings by the pope, and for any and every [172] other thing that belongs with the papal system. He can carry his Sunday-law precedents farther back than that: he can go back to the time of Theodosius and Constantine. He can find, and so can you or anybody else, that as *Pontifex Maximus* of the old pagan system, Constantine "had the plenary power of appointing holy days;" he can find that by virtue of this power, Constantine established the first Sunday-law of all time, in honor of the "venerable day of the sun," whose special devotee he was; and also that, as "bishop of externals" of the new pagan system,—the papal,—which office he assumed by virtue of his political conversion to the political Christianity of his time, he played into the hands of the ambitious bishops by giving them in that Sunday law their coveted "use of the power of the State for the furtherance of their aims" to compel men to accept the decrees, and submit to the dictates, of the church. He, and all others, will find that this is the literal truth of the origin of Sunday laws.

All this is supported by abundance of testimony of undoubted authority. So eminent a divine as Dean Stanley declares plainly that the retention of the old pagan name of "*dies solis*," or Sunday, for the weekly Christian festival,

> is owing to the union of pagan and Christian sentiment with which the first day of the week was recommended by Constantine to his subjects, pagan and Christian alike, as the 'venerable day of the sun.' ... It was his mode of harmonizing the discordant religions of the empire under one common institution.

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This same mode of harmonizing paganism with Christianity was further illustrated by his imperial coins, bearing on one side the name of Christ, and on the other the figure of the sun god, with the inscription, "the unconquerable sun." This confusion of pagan and Christian ideas and practices is what made the [173] papacy, the union of church and state, and the confusion of civil and religious things, from which, with the exception of the government of the United States, the nations have not even yet freed themselves. This, sir, is the authority, and the only authority, for Sunday laws. Sunday has no basis whatever as a civil institution; it never had any. And the only basis it has, or ever had, as a *religious* institution is in that confusion of paganism and Christianity which made the papacy, with all that it is or ever was.

As authority for Sunday, and as the basis of this legislation, Dr. Johnson here to-day appealed to the fourth commandment. The "American Sabbath Union," now in session in this city, and which is working for the passage of this bill, likewise declares the basis of their whole movement to be the fourth commandment. It is proper, therefore, to inquire, What authority is there for Sunday laws, in the fourth commandment? As this is a question of legislation and of law, I shall examine it from the standpoint of law. Suppose, then, that this bill has become a law, and the courts in construing it take judicial cognizance of the fourth commandment as the basis of the law.

Courts are guided by certain well-established rules in the construction of laws. According to these rules, what would be the result of the judicial construction of such a law upon the basis of the fourth commandment?

1. "What a court is to do, is to declare the law as written."

The fourth commandment as written is as follows;—

> Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shall not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: [174] for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

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That commandment as written says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath." Consequently, at the very first step the first day of the week, as declared in the bill, and as these people demand, would be completely shut out. But if any should innocently inquire, The seventh day of what? the commandment itself is ready with an explicit answer. It is the day upon which the Lord rested from the work of creation. In that work he employed six days, and the seventh day he rested, and that alone, as Dr. Johnson has said, established the weekly division of time. As those seven days formed the first week of time, the seventh of those seven was the seventh day of the week, and that is the seventh day fixed in the commandment. This is confirmed by the Scriptures throughout. The New Testament itself declares that the Sabbath is past before the first day of the week comes. Mark 16:1, 2, says:—

> And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.

Those people mentioned in this Scripture came to the sepulcher very early in the morning of the first day of the week; yet the Sabbath was past. This national Sunday-bill which is here under discussion proposes to secure the religious observance of the Sabbath on the first day of the week. But such a thing can never be done, because according to the scripture, the Sabbath is past before the first day of the week comes. It matters not how early persons may come to the first day of the week and its observance, they will be too late [175] to find the Sabbath in it; because by the word of the Lord it is past before the first day of the week comes.

This is made yet more positive, if need be, by the record in Luke 23:56 and 24:1, which says:—

> And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.

Here it is declared that certain people rested the Sabbath day *according to the commandment,* and then on the first day of the week did

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what they would not do on the Sabbath day. This proves conclusively that the Sabbath day according to the commandment which these men cite, and which it is supposed that the courts will have to interpret when this becomes a law,—this proves that Sabbath day is the day before the first day of the week, and therefore plainly demonstrates that the seventh day named in the commandment is nothing else than the seventh day of the week. Therefore, if courts, in the interpretation of this commandment as the basis of a Sunday law, declare the law as written and as defined by the plain word of the Lord, they will have to declare that the seventh day of the week, and not the first day, is the Sabbath.

2. "In the case of all law, it is the intent of the lawgiver that is to be enforced."

What, then, was the intent of the Lawgiver when the fourth commandment was given? Did the Lawgiver declare or show in any way his intention?—He did. When the Lord gave that law at Sinai he did not leave it to the people to interpret it to suit themselves, nor to interpret it at all. By three special acts every week, kept up continuously for nearly forth years, he showed his intent in the law. The people were fed by manna in their forth years' wanderings. But on the [176] seventh day of the week no manna ever fell. On the sixth day of the week there was a double portion, and that which was gathered on that day would keep over the seventh, which it could not be made to do at any other period, or over any other day in the week.

By this means the Lawgiver signified his intent upon the subject of observing the day mentioned in that law; and keeping it up continuously for so long a time made it utterly impossible that his intent should be mistaken.

Therefore, if the courts of the United States shall ever take judicial cognizance of the fourth commandment, which is held forth by these people as the basis and the authority for their movement, according to this rule, the seventh day of the week, and not the first day, will have to be declared the Sabbath.

3. "When words are plain in a written law, there is an end to all construction: they must be followed."

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Are the words of the fourth commandment plain words?—They are. There is not an obscure nor an ambiguous word in the commandment.

Then, according to this rule, if ever that question becomes one of judicial cognizance in the courts of the United States, the seventh day of the week, and not the first day, will have to be declared to be the Sabbath. That is all that the courts can declare.

Therefore, the conclusion of the whole matter thus far is that if our courts are to remain courts of law and are to be guided by the established rules for the construction of law, they never can uphold any law for the enforcement of the Sabbath or the Lord's day on the first day of the week.

Just here, however, another element comes into court, and that is the theological. The theologians step in right here and declare that the intention of the fourth commandment has been changed, and that now, instead of that commandment's requiring the observance of the [177] seventh day in remembrance of creation, it requires the observance of the first day of the week in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ. To reach this point they first declare that the phrase "the seventh day' in the commandment is indefinite; that it does not enjoin the observance of any particular day, but only of one day in seven. But such a construction is not only clearly in violation of established rules for the construction of law, but it involves an assumption of power on their part that can never be allowed. Admitting for argument's sake that that phrase in the commandment is indefinite, it must be admitted that the Lord, when he wrote it, intentionally made it indefinite, because the Scripture says that when he had spoken these words, he added no more; he had nothing more to say on the subject. What he said then was final. If, then, that statement be indefinite, he intended it so, and no other than the Lord ever can, or ever has the right to, make it definite. But the theologians, just as soon as they make it indefinite to escape the obligation which it enjoins to observe the seventh day, then make it definite in order to sustain the supposed obligation to keep the first day of the week. Consequently, when they make it definite after having declared that the Lord made it indefinite, they assume the power and the prerogative to do what the Lord intentionally declined to do; and in that they put themselves above God.

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So much for their theological assumptions. Such a course is not only theologically an assumption of almighty power, but on the basis of law it is a violation of the rule which declares that—

> 4. "No forced or unnatural construction is to be put upon the language of a statute."

To make the phrase "the seventh day" in that commandment indefinite, and mean any one day in seven and not any seventh day in particular, is nothing else [178] than to put a forced and unnatural construction upon the language, not only of the commandment itself throughout, but on all the language of the Scriptures upon the subject of the commandment.

Further, to make that commandment support the observance of the first day of the week in commemoration of the resurrection, is not only to put a forced and most unnatural construction upon it, but is a direct violation of that other rule of law which declares that—

> 5. "A constitution [or statute] is not to be made to mean one thing at one time and another at some subsequent time when the circumstances may have so changed as perhaps to make a different rule in the case seem desirable ... The meaning of the constitution [or statute] is fixed when it is adopted, and it is not different at any subsequent time when a court has occasion to pass upon it."

As I have clearly proved, the meaning of the fourth commandment when it was given was that the seventh day of the week should be observed, and for the reason that God rested that day from the work of creation, and blessed the day and hallowed it. That Sabbath day for that reason was established before man had sinned, and before there was any need of the resurrection of Christ. If man had never sinned, the day would have been observed, for the reason given, in commemoration of the rest of the Creator from his work of creation. That being the meaning of the commandment when the commandment was given, that must be the meaning of the commandment so long as the commandment remains. And according to this rule it can never be made to mean anything else; although to the theologians who wish to have it so, the circumstances concerning the resurrection may seem to make it desirable.

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Here the question very pertinently arises, Shall the Congress and the courts of the United States adopt the wishes of the theologians, and, in violation of the rules [179] of law, undertake to make the statute of God mean that which it was never intended to mean? In contemplation of this demand which is now made by the theologians, the words of Judge Cooley—"Constitutional Limitations," p. 67—are worthy of consideration by Congress, as well as by the judges of the United States courts. He says:—

> A court of legislature which should allow a change of public sentiment to influence it in giving to a written constitution a construction not warranted by the intention of its founders, would be justly chargeable with reckless disregard of official oath and public duty.

The theologians have given to the fourth commandment a construction which is not in any sense warranted by the intention of the Author of the Commandment. They come to the national legislature, and ask it to allow itself to be influenced by these theological sentiments in giving to that written constitution of the government of God, a construction which is not warranted by the intention of Founder of that constitution. As Judge Cooley says, such a thing done to a human constitution, an earthly statute, would be reckless disregard of official oath and public duty. But if this is true in the case of things wholly human and earthly, what should be thought of such an action with reference to the divine constitution, and heavenly law?

Will the national legislature allow this theological sentiment to influence it to commit an act with reference to the constitution and laws of the living God, which, if committed with reference to the laws of men, would be reckless disregard of official oath and public duty? Not only do I ask, Is the national legislature ready to do this? but is it ready also by doing it to force the United States courts into the sanctioning of it in direct violation of the plainest principles of every rule for the construction of law? Is the national legislature ready to take the step which would turn all [180] our courts of law into courts of theology? For such would be the only effect of the enactment of such a law as is here demanded by the theologians; because when the law comes to be interpreted by the courts upon the basis upon which the law is enacted, the first day of the week as the Sabbath can never be sustained by rules of law or by the principles of

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interpretation established in law. The only way it can ever be sustained is by principles established by the theologians and by theological distinctions, in total disregard of the rules of law; and the effect of it can be nothing else than to turn our courts of law into courts of theology.

More than this, the Scriptures plainly and logically show the seventh day to be the Lord's day. The actual expression, "the Lord's day," is used but once in the Bible, and that in Revelation 1:10, saying, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." But that text does not say what day of the week the Lord's day is. Other texts in the Bible, however, speak on the subject in such a way as logically to show what day is meant by the expression, "the Lord's day." The Lord himself said, "The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Mark 2:28.

The Lord also said, "The seventh day is the Sabbath." Here are two plain Scripture statements which may form the premises of a syllogism; thus;—

Major: The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Minor: The seventh day is the Sabbath.

The only conclusion that can ever be drawn from these premises is,—

Therefore, the Son of man is Lord of the seventh day.

That conclusion is just as sound as these two statements of Scripture are, and the two statements of Scripture are as plain and positive on that subject as any two statements ever can be made. Forming another [181] syllogism, of which the above conclusion shall be the minor, we have this:—

Major: Whatever day it is of which the Son of man is Lord, is the Lord's day.

Minor: The Son of man is Lord of the seventh day.

Therefore, the Lord's day is the seventh day.

This logic is unquestionable; this conclusion is just as true as the Scripture itself. Therefore, as surely as courts undertake the interpretation of any statute enforcing the observance of the Lord's day, and enter upon an inquiry as to what day is the Lord's day, they will, if logical, be brought

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face to face with the fact as demonstrated by the word of the Lord himself, that the seventh day, and not the first day, is the Lord's day.

But it will probably be said that the courts are not to enter upon the interpretation of Scripture; they are to interpret the law as it has been enacted, and as it is written; and the law as enacted says that the first day of the week is the Lord's day, and that is as far as the courts can go. Suppose that be granted. Then that puts the United States Government into the place where it establishes an institution as the Lord's and enforces its observance, which not only the Lord has not established, but which is directly contrary to the plain word of the Lord upon the subject of this institution and its observance.

One or the other of these alternatives therefore the United States Government will be forced to adopt as surely as this bill or any one like it shall ever become a law. The Government will either have to become the authoritative interpreter of Scripture for all the citizens of the Government, or else it will have to put itself in the place of God, and authoritatively declare that observances established by the State and which it calls the Lord's are the Lord's indeed, although the word of the Lord declares the contrary. Is the United [182] States Government ready to take either of these positions? Is the Congress of the United States ready to force the Government of the United States to the alternative of taking one or the other of these positions?

The taking of either of these positions by the Government would be nothing else than for this enlightened nation, in this period of the nineteenth century, to assume the place, the power, and the prerogatives of the governments of the Middle Ages in enforcing the dogmas and the definitions of the theologians, and executing the arbitrary and despotic will of the church.

Thus, from whatever point this subject of Sunday laws may be viewed, it plainly appears that aside from the papacy there is no authority whatever for Sunday laws, nor even for Sunday keeping; and that the only effect that a national Sunday law can ever have, will be only evil, and that continually. Let Congress now and forever decidedly and utterly refuse to

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have anything to do with it in any way whatever; and let all the people, instead of sanctioning a movement to bring the national legislation down to the degraded level of the States on this subject, put forth every effort to bring the legislation of the States up to that place where it shall be limited as the power of Congress is limited by the declaration of the national Constitution, that it "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Now, in the name of law, Constitutional and statutory, moral and civil; in the name of enlightenment and progress; in the name of reason and the revelation of Jesus Christ, I seriously ask, Why should the people of such a nation as this, living under such a constitution as is our national Constitution, be asked to return to the papal system in the Dark Ages, which was only the inevitable outcome of the wicked scheme that was conceived in sin,—"the man of sin,"—and brought forth [183] in iniquity,—"the mystery of iniquity,"—in the days of Constantine? Why should such a people as this, dwelling under the best Constitution and the most enlightened influences of all ages, be asked to return to the wicked system that characterized the Middle Ages?

No, sir; the noble men who pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor, when they established our Constitution, separated, as they supposed forever, this nation from all the wicked influences of the church-and-state systems of the colonies, of England, and of all other nations of all times. And under this Constitution, in true liberty, civil and religious, in genuine enlightenment and progress, this nation has deservedly stood as the beacon light of the world for a hundred years. Let this splendid nation ever still look forward and not backward; let it still hold its honored place before all the nations; and God forbid that by any such effort as is now being made in behalf of this Sunday law, this glorious nation should be brought down from her high place, and made to follow in the papal train.

Gentlemen, no further argument is needed to show that the Sunday laws of all the States, and the principles of the decisions of the Supreme Courts which sustain them, are wholly wrong, springing from the papal principle of church and state, and supported by the equally un-American principle of the omnipotence of the legislative power. They are totally

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subversive of American principles. Yet Sunday laws have never been, and can never be, sustained on any other principle. And this is only to say that which is the sum of all this discussion: There is no foundation in justice, in right, *or even in expediency,* for any Sunday laws, or Lord's-day laws, or Sabbath laws, UNDER ANY GOVERNMENT ON THIS EARTH. [184]

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Appendix A

THE American Sabbath Union in its "Monthly Documents," has tried to make it appear that, in my argument before the Senate Committee, I admitted the right of the Government to make Sunday laws for the public good. The effort was not only made by the Association in its own documents, but the document and statements were reprinted in *Our Day*. To counteract the influence of this effort, as well as to make the point yet clearer, if possible, and expose another method which the Sunday-law workers employ to secure support for their movement, I insert the following—

OPEN LETTER

To the Rev. J. H. Knowles, Secretary of the American Sabbath Union.

DEAR SIR: In the monthly documents of the American Sunday Association, edited by yourself, you have chosen to charge me with insincerity; and you have also done your best to make it appear that I "admit all that the friends of the Sunday-rest law generally claim—the right of the Government to make Sunday laws for the public good."

You have garbled extracts from the report of my speech before the Senate Committee on the Sunday law, and then have italicized certain words and sentences in one passage to try to make it appear that I admit the right of the Government to make Sunday laws for the public good.

You have quoted from my speech the following words in the following way— [185]

> Whenever any civil government attempts to enforce anything in regard to any one of the first four commandments, it invades the prerogative of God, and is to be disobeyed (I do not say resisted, but disobeyed).... The State, in its legislation, can never legislate properly in regard to any man's religious faith, or in relation to anything in the first four commandments of the decalogue; *but if in the exercise of his religious convictions under the first four commandments he invades the rights of his neighbor, then the civil government says that is unlawful.*

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> *Why? Because it is irreligious or because it is immoral?—Not at all; but because it is uncivil, and for that reason only.* [Italics ours.—ED]

It is in the italicizing of these words that your effort is made to make me admit what I continually and consistently denied before the committee, and do deny everywhere else. You have inserted in the above quotation three periods, indicating that a portion has been left out; and you know full well, sir, that in the portion which is there left out, is the following:—

> **Senator Blair.—**'You oppose all the Sunday laws of the Country, then?'
>
> **Mr. Jones.—**'Yes, sir.'
>
> **Senator Blair.—**'You are against all Sunday laws?'
>
> **Mr. Jones.—**'Yes, sir; we are against every Sunday law that was ever made in this world, from the first enacted by Constantine to this one now proposed.'
>
> **Senator Blair.—**'State and national alike?'
>
> **Mr. Jones.—**'State and national, sir.'

Not only were these words there, but in that portion which you have printed following the italicized words, you yourself have printed my plain denial of the right of any nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of a thousand to compel the thousandth man to rest on the day on which the majority rest, in the following from:—

> **Senator Blair.—**'The majority has a right to rule in what pertains to the regulation of society; and if [186] Caesar regulates society, then the majority has a right in this country to say what shall be rendered to Caesar.'
>
> **Mr. Jones.—**'If nine hundred and ninety-nine people out of every thousand in the United States kept the seventh day, that is, Saturday, and I deemed it my choice and right to keep Sunday, I would insist on it, and they would have no right to compel me to rest on Saturday.'
>
> **Senator Blair.—**'In other words, you take the grounds that for the good of society, *irrespective of the religious aspect of the question,* society may not require abstinence from labor on the Sabbath, if it disturbs others?'
>
> **Mr. Jones.—**'No, sir.'

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> **Senator Blair.**—'You are logical all the way through that there shall be no Sabbath.'

That last expression of mine, saying "No, sir," is in accord, and was intended when spoken to be in accord, with Senator Blair's inquiring statement whether society may not require abstinence from labor on the Sabbath. My answer there means, and when it was spoken it was intended to mean, that society *may not* do so. As to its disturbing others, I had just before proved that the common occupations of men who choose to work on Sunday or any other day do not disturb and cannot disturb the rest of the majority who choose to rest that day.

Again: A little farther along you print another passage in which are the following words:—

> **Senator Blair.**—You would abolish any Sabbath in human practice which shall be in the form of law, unless the individual here and there sees fit to observe it?'
>
> **Mr. Jones.**—'Certainly; that is a matter between man and his God.'

Now, I should like for you in a monthly document, or by some other means, to show how by any fair means, or by any sincere purpose, you can, even by the use of [187] italics, make me in that speech admit the right of the Government to make Sunday laws for the public good. You know, sir, that in that speech I distinctly stated that any human laws for the enforcement of the Sabbath, instead of being "for the good of society, are for the ruin of society."

Again: You know, for you printed it in one of your documents, that Senator Blair said to me: "You are logical all the way through that there shall be no Sabbath." You know that in another place he said again to me: "You are entirely logical, because you say there should be no Sunday legislation by State or nation either."

Now, sir, I repeat, you have charged me with insincerity. Any one making such a charge as that ought to be sincere. Will you, therefore, explain upon what principle it is that you claim to be sincere in this thing, when in the face of these positive and explicit statements to the contrary and Senator Blair's confirmation of them to that effect, you can deliberately attempt to force into my words a meaning that was never

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there, that was never intended to be there, and that never can by any honest means be put there?

More than this: It can hardly be thought that Senator Blair will very highly appreciate the compliment that you have paid to his logical discernment, when in the fact of his repeated statement that I was logical all the way through, you force into my words a meaning that could have no other effect than to make me illogical all the way through.

I have no objection to your printing my words as they were spoken; but I do object to your forcing into them a meaning directly contrary to that which the words themselves convey, and which they were intended to convey; and I further object to your so garbling my statements as to make it possible for you [188] to force into them a meaning that they never can honestly be made to bear.

In that speech also I said that if an idol-worshiper in this country should attempt to offer a human sacrifice, the Government should protect the life of its subject from the exercise of that man's religion; that he has the right to worship any idol that he chooses, but that he has not the right to commit murder in the worship of his idol, and the State forbids the murder without any reference at all to the question as to whether that man is religious or whether he worships or not, with no reference at all to the commandment which forbids idol-worship, and with no thought whatever of forbidding his idolatry. I stated also that if anybody claiming apostolic example should practice community of property, and in carrying out that practice should take your property or mine without our consent, the State would forbid the theft without any reference at all to the man's religious opinions, and with no thought of forbidding the practice of community of property. You know that it was with direct reference to these words that I used the words which you have italicized. I there distinctly denied that the State can ever of right legislate in relation to anything in the first four commandments of the decalogue. But, if any man in the exercise of his rights under the first four commandments, and in this case under the fourth commandment, should invade the right of his neighbor, as I have expressed it, by endangering his life, his liberty, or his property, or attack his character, or invade his rights in any way, the government has the right to prohibit it, because of the incivility;

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but with never any question as to whether the man is religious or irreligious, and with never a purpose or a thought of forbidding the free exercise of any man's right to work on any day or all days, as he chooses. [189]

This is precisely what every State in this Union already does by statutes which punish disturbances of religious worship or religious meetings, or peaceable assemblies of any sort. But there is a vast difference between such statutes as these and the ones which you desire shall be enacted. These are strictly civil statutes, prohibiting incivility, and are far from anything like the enforcement of religions observances. The Sunday-law workers complain of the disturbance of their worship on Sunday. If they are sincere in this, why don't they enforce the laws already on the statute books prohibiting disturbance of worship? California, for instance, prohibits disturbance of worship, under penalty of five hundred dollars' fine and six months in jail. But instead of having such legitimate laws enforce, you propose to prohibit the disturbance of your worship on Sunday by compelling everybody to keep Sunday. Upon this same principle you would have the State forbid the offering of human sacrifices by an idol worshiper, by compelling him to keep the second commandment. In short, the principle is that you would have the State prohibit incivility by compelling everybody to be religious. And you are so enraptured with this distorted view, that you have chosen in your sincerity and by *italics* to force me to sanction the wicked principle. But it will not work. I say always, If your worship is disturbed on Sunday or at any other time, let the State punish the person or persons who create the disturbance. Let the State punish them by such strictly legitimate statutes as the States already have on this subject. But let the State never attempt to prohibit disturbance of worship by trying to compel men to worship, nor attempt to prohibit incivility by enforcing religious observances. This is just what I had in view, and is precisely what I meant, in the words which you have italicized. [190]

All this is further shown in the argument which I made, in that, immediately following the words which you have italicized I proved that Sunday work does not disturb the rest or the worship of those who keep Sunday. And the conclusion of that is, therefore, that there is no basis for Sunday laws on that ground. This I prove by the fact that the people who make this the ground of their demand for Sunday laws, do not recognize

DOJ-RLC Comment-019719

for an instant that work on Saturday disturbs the rest or the worship of the people who keep Saturday. I there showed that if your work on Saturday does not disturb my rest or my worship, my work on Sunday cannot disturb your rest or your worship. I made this argument not only on this principle, but from actual experience. I know, from an experience of fifteen years, that other people's work on Saturday does not disturb either my rest or my worship on that day. There are Seventh-day Adventists in every State and Territory of this nation, in Canada, nearly every country of Europe, the Sandwich Islands, Australia, South America, China, South Africa, and other places. They all rest every Saturday; they all keep it as the Sabbath unto the Lord. But no person has ever yet head of a Seventh-day Adventist who ever complained that his rest on the Sabbath was disturbed by other men's work. Not only is this so, but the Seventh-day Adventists have organized churches in the great majority of the States and Territories of this Union. These churches are found in country places, in villages, in towns, and in cities. They meet for worship every Saturday; and although, as everybody knows, Saturday is the busiest day of the week, in the midst of such busy cities as Chicago, Denver, San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Kansas City, these churches of Seventh-day Adventists assemble regularly for worship; and no person has ever yet heard of any Seventh-day Adventists' making a complaint that their worship was [191] disturbed by the work, the business, or the traffic that is carried on by other people on that day. The fact is, our worship is *not* disturbed by these things.

Now, sir, if all the labor, the business, and the traffic that is done on Saturday, the day which is acknowledged by all to be the busiest day of the week.—if all this, In such cities as I have named, does not disturb our rest or our worship, will you please explain how it is that your rest and your worship are disturbed on Sunday, when there is not one-thousandth part as much labor, or business, or traffic done on that day as is done on Saturday?

This, dear sir, is only an additional argument, but one which rests on the living experience of thousands of people every seventh day, conclusively showing that your whole theory and claim for Sunday laws break down utterly at every point.

ALONZO T. Jones.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019720

Appendix B

THE following letter from Cardinal Gibbons to Mr. D. E. Lindsey, of Baltimore, shows from the Cardinal himself, that the counting of all the Roman Catholics of the country in favor of the Sunday law on the Cardinal's indorsement, as Dr. Crafts and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union have done, was wholly unwarranted. This is exactly as I argued before the Senate Committee, and as we have argued everywhere else. We have never blamed Cardinal Gibbons for that which Dr. Crafts and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union put upon him.

> CARDINAL'S RESIDENCE, 408 NORTH CHARLES ST., BALTIMORE, Md., Feb. 27, 1889.
>
> MY DEAR SIR: In reply to your favor dated Feb. 25, 1889, duly received, His Eminence Cardinal Gibbons desires me to write to you, that whatsoever countenance His Eminence has given to the 'Sunday law' referred to in your favor, as he had not the authority, so he had not the intention, of binding the archbishops, the bishops, or the Catholic laity of the United States. His Eminence bids me say to you that he was moved to write a letter favoring the passage of the bill, mainly from a consideration of the rest and recreation which would result to our poor overworked fellow-citizens, and of the facility which it would then afford them of observing the Sunday in a religious and decorous way.
>
> It is incorrect to assume that His Eminence, in the alleged words of Senator Blair set forth in your favor 'singed the bill, thus pledging seven millions two hundred thousand Catholics as indorsing the bill.'
>
> I have the honor to remain, with much respect yours faithfully, J. P. DONAHUE, *Chancellor.*
>
> *To D. E. Lindsey, Esq., 708 Rayner Avenue, Baltimore, Md.*

DOJ-RLC Comment-019721



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PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-019722

From: Michael Fortune <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Religious Liberty Commission Statement
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 19:01:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

PII

The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not support the Religious Liberty Commission's recent declaration that there is no separation between church and state.

Our co-founder Ellen White said:

“Let not the commandment-keeping people of God be silent at this time as though we gracefully accepted the situation." — The S.D.A. Bible Commentary 7:975 (1889).

"We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. Fervent, effectual prayer should be ascending to heaven that this calamity may be deferred until we can accomplish the work which has so long been neglected. Let there be most earnest prayer and then let us work in harmony with our prayers." —Testimonies for the Church 5:714 (1889).

"We cannot labor to please men who will use their influence to repress religious liberty...The people of God are not to vote to place such men in office, for when they do this they are partakers with them of the sins which they commit while in office." — Fundamentals of Christian Education, 475 (1899).

Respectfully,

Pastor Mike Fortune

PII

PII

PII

From: Debbie Messinger <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on Presidential RL Commission draft Report
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 19:01:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. I am concerned about religious liberty in our country. I feel the government should not hold sway over people's conscience on who and how to worship. In the past countries have tried to legislate religion. History and current events show a separation of church and state is needed, otherwise one person's faith group ends up persecuting another person's faith group. We need to have tolerance of all faiths. This is why we have in our constitution "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise there of."

I object to funding religious non-profit activities.

I object to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.

I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts church's political activities. I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

I strongly desire and implore you to assure complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.

Thank you for your sincere consideration. May God bless you in this process.

Debbie Messinger

From: Jay Huffman <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church & State
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 19:23:31 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear RLC,
It has come to my attention that you wish some feedback on the current definition of Church & State. I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, we currently have approximately 25 Million Members Worldwide. We are FOR The Seperation of Church and State. I as a member of the SDA Church, Do also hold to the Seperation of Church & State, and Wish to make my Opinion heard. Whenever the Church has gained the Power of the State, Persecution has Always been the sure result. No Man or Government has the Right to Force their Belief upon another. Please Read, "The Great Controversy" Book by Ellen G. White. Thank You for Hearing my Opinion.

Sincerely yours,
Junior Dee Huffman
[redacted]
P.S. Feel Free to Contact me by Phone or Address for clarification.

From: Myckal Morehouse <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause and Johnson Amendment – Myckal A. Morehouse
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 19:38:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

My name is Myckal A. Morehouse. I am the lead pastor of the Sandpoint Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sandpoint, Idaho, with more than eighteen years in pastoral ministry. I write as an individual minister, not as an official representative of my denomination, though the convictions I express here flow from a religious liberty tradition my church has maintained for over 150 years.

I share the Commission's conviction that religious liberty is America's first freedom, and I am grateful for its attention to genuine instances of hostility toward people of faith. But I write to respectfully caution against two of the report's recommendations: reframing the Establishment Clause away from the principle of separation, and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

Seventh-day Adventists know from history that the machinery of government which can favor religion today can enforce it tomorrow. In the 1880s, our members were arrested, fined, and sentenced to chain gangs under state Sunday laws for the crime of working on a day their conscience did not regard as sacred. When the Blair Sunday-Rest Bill came before Congress in 1888, Adventists stood nearly alone in opposing legislation that most Christians of the day considered a blessing. We learned then what we still believe now: the Establishment Clause does not exist to protect the government from religion, nor even primarily to protect majorities. It exists to protect the conscience of the minority — the Sabbath-keeper, the dissenter, the citizen whose faith does not align with the prevailing culture.

The report suggests that the "wall of separation" has been weaponized against believers, and in some instances that is true. But the remedy for misapplication is correction, not demolition. A "bridge" between church and state, however well-intentioned, carries traffic in both directions. Every precedent that permits government to promote religious observance becomes available to a future administration whose religion is not mine — or yours. History offers no example of a government that gained the power to encourage worship and never proceeded to prefer, and then to compel, a particular form of it. The coercion standard now serves as the last firewall; I urge the Commission not to recommend anything that would invite courts to narrow it.

Regarding the Johnson Amendment: as a pastor, I do not experience it as a muzzle but as a protection. My pulpit's authority rests on the congregation's confidence that I answer to Scripture, not to a party or a donor. Repeal would invite tax-deductible political money to flow through churches, and with that money, political obligation. The pulpit that becomes useful to a campaign will eventually be used by one. Pastors remain free to address every moral issue Scripture addresses, and citizens remain free to endorse candidates personally. That balance protects the church far more than it burdens her.

Religious liberty is strongest when the government is strictly neutral — neither hostile to faith nor entangled with it. I urge the Commission to revise its recommendations to affirm robust free exercise for all Americans while preserving, not softening, the Establishment Clause's separation principle and the Johnson Amendment's guardrails.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and for your service on these questions of first importance.

Respectfully submitted,

Myckal A. Morehouse
Lead Pastor, Sandpoint Seventh-day Adventist Church
Sandpoint, Idaho

DOJ-RLC Comment-019727

From: Linden SDA <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State - Linden Tx Seventh-day Adventist Church
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 19:56:15 -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,

--
Linden Tx Seventh-day Adventist Church

From: Betty Short <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 20:24:28 -0400
Importance: Normal

God created every person with the freedom to choose whom they will worship (Joshua 24:15). The role of the church is to proclaim the gospel through love, truth, and persuasion, while the role of civil government is to preserve justice, protect individual rights, and maintain public order (Romans 13:1–7). When these distinct roles become joined, history shows that religious liberty is endangered.

Whenever the state enforces religious beliefs or practices, those whose convictions differ from the majority are at risk of discrimination, loss of freedom, or persecution. Genuine faith cannot be compelled by law; it must be the free response of a willing heart. Jesus Himself declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), demonstrating that His kingdom advances through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit rather than through civil authority.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution reflects this important principle by protecting both the free exercise of religion and preventing the establishment of a state religion. These protections allow people of every faith—or of no faith—to worship according to conscience without fear of government coercion.

From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, the preservation of religious liberty is especially significant. Scripture warns that in the last days civil and religious powers will unite to compel worship contrary to God’s commandments (Revelation 13). For this reason, Christians should uphold the God-given freedom of conscience for all people, recognizing that religious liberty is not merely a constitutional principle but a biblical one. Protecting the rights of those with whom we disagree today helps preserve the freedom of conscience for everyone tomorrow.

Is this truly what many millions have died for to protect this country?

From: Betty Short <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and state
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 21:19:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

God created every person with the freedom to choose whom they will worship (Joshua 24:15). The role of the church is to proclaim the gospel through love, truth, and persuasion, while the role of civil government is to preserve justice, protect individual rights, and maintain public order (Romans 13:1–7). When these distinct roles become joined, history shows that religious liberty is endangered.

Whenever the state enforces religious beliefs or practices, those whose convictions differ from the majority are at risk of discrimination, loss of freedom, or persecution. Genuine faith cannot be compelled by law; it must be the free response of a willing heart. Jesus Himself declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), demonstrating that His kingdom advances through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit rather than through civil authority.

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From: "Korff, Eugene" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Government lacks authority over religion
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 21:31:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

“Make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”.

Government has no authority to tell me what to believe, or how to worship.

From: Allyson Livesay <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission draft report
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 21:32:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

PUBLIC COMMENT
Separation of Church and State
Allyson Livesay

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I appreciate the freedoms that US citizens of all faiths and backgrounds enjoy in this great country. This is one of the things that makes it a privilege to be an American citizen. I also understand the tensions that exist in this great country that are straining those freedoms.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, and I personally appreciate the freedom I enjoy to believe in and worship the God of the Bible, as the Holy Spirits convicts. When I heard the Commission's report, it truly concerned me that you recommend replacing the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge.

Our denomination has been a staunch advocate of the separation of church and state from the beginning. We believe that biblically, both institutions were established by God for distinct purposes, and that any connection between them can lead to corruption and intolerance. History has revealed that frequently the state has used the church to gain its ends, and in other instances the church has dominated the state. In either case, freedom of conscience has been threatened and persecution has resulted. That is a historical fact from the Dark Ages, and that has happened to our own denomination in the US in the 1880s under Sunday Blue Laws.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the distinctly different purpose of "Caesar's" kingdom and Christ's kingdom are be achieved when neither is subservient to the other and neither encroaches in the areas that belong to the other. We believe in civil government as divinely ordained to protect men in the enjoyment of their natural rights, and to rule in civil things, and that in this realm itis entitled to the respectful and willing obedience of all.

I also have objections to state or government funding religious non-profit activities for various reasons. I have personally worked for a Christian non-profit institution that eventually began to accept state and government funding. Ultimately, the non-profit lost its freedom to share anything with a religious orientation which I believe was a disservice to God. Today that organization is non-existent.

The policy of separation of church and state was rare among eighteenth-century governments just as it is today. It has promoted prosperity and harmony for both the churches and the civil government in the United States. The wall was built by believers too keep the church free. History is our greatest witness!

When Thomas Jefferson first invoked the phrase, he explained by it was important. "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.

I am also concerned that you want to repeal the Johnson Amendment. I request that the amendment be fully supported and restored.

Finally, let us pray for God's people, for a revival of primitive godliness and fresh wind and fresh fire. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

I don't come to you with any eloquence of speech, just heartfelt concern. Thank you for giving us this opportunity to make our comments.

God bless America, and God bless you all!

Allyson Livesay

From: Ikey DeVasher <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I Reject the Commission's Draft Report regarding building a bridge between Church and the US government.
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 21:38:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am writing to reject 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. As a student of history, and seeing how in the Middle Ages (often referred to as the "Dark Ages) the Church came to not just be one side of a bridge, it dominated society resulting in the travesty of persecuting those who did not believe as the official State Church believed.
The largest denomination in the world, the Catholic Church, once was party of such a bridge and even today denies that individuals should have freedom of conscience. To have the US government sanction such a bridge will only lead to lack of individual freedom to worship God according to their own conscience, and usher in persecution. For instance, as a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe God ordained the seventh day as Sabbath, as the day upon which to rest. He even later in Scripture he refers to the Sabbath as a sign that He sanctifies His people.
On the other hand, the Catholic Church lauds the fact that she took the authority upon herself to change the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day, to Sunday, the first day. Even now the Catholic Church in its literature and practice is urging Sunday as a day of rest "for the earth." It is just a small step from this to urging Congress to upend the Constitutional guarantees about freedom of worship and making laws that US Citizens shall all worship on Sunday. But no one should be surprised by this, because the prophet Daniel prophesied that there would arise a power that would "think to change times and laws, which obviously the Catholic Church has done, and even has accused Protestants of not really believing in "the Bible only' since most Protestants do keep Sunday as Sabbath. My concern is my ability and the ability of my church and my children to have freedom granted by the USA, to worship on the true Biblical Sabbath if they choose to do so.
Please DO NOT SUPPORT building a bridge between Church and State!!
Respectfully,
Mary E "Ikey" DeVasher, PhD, CRNA

From: Josiah Wannemacher <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Pastor Josiah Wannemacher Commisoon on Religious Liberty
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 21:51:28 -0400
Importance: Normal

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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches.
In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.
The American Development of Separation of Church and State
The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.
Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.
In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement. 1
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341. 1
The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.2

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in Everson v. Board of Education, 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience, published in London in the same year.3 Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of Reynolds v. United States. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government," and that religion flourished better without 4 government patronage. George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty 5

3 Roger Williams, Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered (1644), in The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

4 James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

5 Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion." President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, 6 not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled." President Grant said, "Keep 7 the church and the state forever separate." President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use 8 public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute." President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete 9

severance of Church and State."10

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [Everson], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 6 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore, 1856. 7

Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875. 8

James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 9

1880.

10 Theodore Roosevelt, Fear God and Take Your Own Part (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York. This is an ad hominem attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that Everson "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated Everson, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere,
without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall

between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the

Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!" The church and state should 11 remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project

of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, “So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order.” He believed that an es-

John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founder 11 - s.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. “For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God.” He went on to observe, “They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes.”12

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, “When I arrived in the United States, it was the country’s religious aspect that first captured my attention.” By speaking to Americans, he learned religion 13 flourished because of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: “Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…”14

Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D., ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & 12 Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340. 13

Roger Williams, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, 14 GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9. For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely Pastor Josiah Wannemacher

I'm happy to testify publicly.

From: Chris Townsend <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please Keep The Johnson Amendment Intact
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 22:54:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

I believe that the government should not go through with separating church and state. This nation was built on the freedom of religion and if church and state is not separated, you are now infringing on the rights of other religions who are not in alignment with the Christian religion, therefore not following the constitution.

I am a Seventh day Adventist. I recently sent an email with the subject worded incorrectly. I am sending this email again to state that I am against combining church and state or in other words getting rid of the Johnson Amendment.

I believe that separating the wall of church and state would a mistake that would actually go against those who worship on the Sabbath. Combining church and state would only make a path easier to enforce Sunday observance which is unconstitutional in terms of freedom of religion.

I also believe that taking away the separation of church and state will also give an unfair advantage to Christians that other religions will not have, and also this act will leave potential for churches and government to abuse power for either the church or governments gain.

Politics has no right in religious affairs, and religion has no right in politics. People should be led by the principles from their religion while governing a people and not have their religion be the lead.

I thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

From: Chris Townsend <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please keep Johnson Amendment Intact
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 23:03:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am a Seventh day Adventist and I believe that taking away the wall of church and state will be a way to impose power of government and church on to people who are not Christian or on Christias who do not believe as those in power do. I believe we should leave the Johnson Amendment as is and follow the constitution.

From: Bogdan Platon <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I support separation between church and state
Date: Fri, 10 Jul 2026 23:45:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Legislators,

I am writing to express my concern regarding efforts to weaken the principle of the separation of church and state. I believe that undermining this principle would have serious consequences for religious freedom and for preserving the integrity of faith.

Every person should have the freedom to worship according to their conscience and sincerely held beliefs, without interference from the government in matters of religion. Protecting the separation of church and state ensure that religious liberty is preserved.

For these reasons, I respectfully support maintaining the separation of church and state. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to protecting the fundamental freedoms guaranteed to all citizens.

Sincerely,

Bogdan Platon
Senior Pastor,
Edinburg Seventh-day Adventist Church English
PhD Student

From: Charmaine Syvertson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION AND COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS – CHARMAINE SYVERTSON
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 00:10:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

My name is **Charmaine Syvertson**. I am a Christian, a Seventh-day Adventist, and a leader of a Christian nonprofit ministry. I am submitting this comment because I believe deeply in religious liberty—not only for Christians, but for every person, every religious minority, and every individual conscience.

I appreciate the Commission's concern for Americans who have experienced hostility, discrimination, loss of employment, censorship, or punishment because they attempted to live according to sincere religious convictions. No American should be forced to abandon faith as the price of education, employment, public service, healthcare, or participation in civic life.

However, after reviewing the draft report, I am deeply concerned that several of its conclusions move beyond protecting the free exercise of religion and toward establishing a cooperative relationship between religious institutions and civil government. That approach may appear favorable to Christianity in the present moment, but it creates principles that can later be used to control, manipulate, favor, finance, redefine, and ultimately coerce religion.

The report's proposed relationship between church and state

The draft correctly states that government may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance. Yet immediately thereafter, it declares:

"In reality, however, church and state strengthen and support one another."

It then proposes that religious liberty should act as a:

"bridge between church and state."

These statements appear on page 22 of the draft report.

I respectfully object to this language.

There is an essential distinction between protecting religious people as they participate in public life and establishing a mutually supportive relationship between religious institutions and government.

The free exercise of religion should be protected. Religious speech should not be censored merely because it is religious. Students should be free to pray voluntarily. Employees should receive reasonable accommodation. Religious organizations should be free to teach and operate according to their convictions within constitutional limits.

But none of these protections requires church and state to "strengthen and support one another."

The church's spiritual authority comes from God—not from the state. The state's civil authority must not be used to advance religious doctrine, determine sacred truth, reward favored religious bodies, or place public power behind religious observance.

A “bridge” between church and state may appear harmless when those in government sympathize with one’s own beliefs. But the same bridge that permits government to assist religion also permits government to enter, influence, supervise, fund, regulate, and eventually control it.

The final report should remove the statement that church and state strengthen and support one another. It should affirm instead that government must protect religious liberty while maintaining a clear institutional boundary between civil authority and ecclesiastical authority.

Government funding of faith-based institutions

The draft recommends that faith-based institutions receive equal access to government funding opportunities without being required to surrender their religious identity. It also recommends “faith-welcoming” language in notices of funding opportunities, training faith groups in the grant-application process, improving their “grant readiness,” and expanding partnerships between government agencies and faith-based institutions. These recommendations appear in the executive summary and again in the detailed recommendations.

I understand the fairness argument. Religious organizations should not be treated as socially inferior merely because they are religious.

Nevertheless, there is a profound difference between protecting a ministry from discrimination and making government its financial partner.

Public funding carries public accountability. Government grants bring applications, eligibility standards, reporting requirements, audits, approved uses, employment rules, administrative oversight, and changing political conditions. Once a ministry becomes financially dependent upon government support, government acquires influence over that ministry—even when such control is not immediately apparent.

A future administration may redefine:

- Which religious practices are acceptable.
- Which doctrines are considered discriminatory.
- Which employees a ministry must hire.
- Which messages may be taught with publicly supported funds.
- Which forms of evangelism or spiritual counsel are permissible.
- Which institutions remain eligible for continued funding.

The danger is not removed merely by declaring that religious institutions may retain their identity. The government that grants this freedom today may attach different conditions tomorrow.

As a Christian nonprofit leader, I believe churches and ministries must retain the freedom to serve, educate, heal, feed, shelter, and evangelize without becoming financially dependent upon civil government.

The final report should distinguish between neutral access to ordinary public services and the direct subsidization of religious ministry. It should also acknowledge that government funding can threaten—not merely protect—the independence and integrity of religious institutions.

Government-funded religious education

The report recommends a “robust and universal system of school choice where funding follows the child.” This recommendation appears in the education section on page 15 and is repeated in the parental-rights recommendations.

Parents possess a God-given responsibility to direct the education and religious formation of their children. I strongly support the right of parents to choose Christian education, homeschooling, cooperative education, or another lawful educational setting.

However, government financing of religious education raises the same serious concern: **government funding can become government influence**.

Once public funds flow into religious schools, those schools may eventually be required to satisfy governmental definitions concerning accreditation, curriculum, employment, nondiscrimination, student discipline, healthcare, religious doctrine, or speech.

A Christian school that depends upon public funding may eventually be pressured to modify the very convictions that made it Christian.

School choice should not become the means by which government money enters religious education and gradually brings religious schools under increased public control. The final report should address this danger honestly and include strong protections against governmental interference, doctrinal regulation, or financial coercion.

The Johnson Amendment

The draft recommends repeal of the Johnson Amendment and further recommends Treasury guidance and litigation challenging its constitutionality. These recommendations appear on page 23 and more fully on page 128.

Pastors and religious leaders must remain free to preach biblical truth, address moral questions, condemn injustice, discuss public policy, and call civil leaders to accountability. The pulpit must never become subject to governmental censorship.

But protecting religious preaching is not the same as converting tax-exempt churches and charitable ministries into political campaign organizations.

Repeal of the Johnson Amendment could create a dangerous exchange:

Political candidates could seek endorsements, votes, congregational networks, and campaign assistance from churches. Churches could seek political access, favorable legislation, government grants, regulatory protection, and public influence from candidates.

This would not free the church from political control. It could bind the church more closely to partisan power.

The church must remain free to speak truth to every political party. It cannot faithfully serve as the conscience of the state if it becomes an arm of a candidate, party, administration, or political movement.

I therefore ask the Commission to distinguish clearly between protected religious and moral speech and direct participation by tax-exempt organizations in candidate campaigns. The protection of sermons should not become the opening through which partisan campaign money, political bargaining, and government favor enter the church.

Government-selected displays of the Ten Commandments

The draft encourages religious displays, including the Ten Commandments, in government-run schools and recommends litigation supporting such displays. Page 76 states that government-run schools may allow religious displays “like the Ten Commandments.”

I believe the Ten Commandments are the law of God. Precisely because they are sacred, civil government should not be permitted to select, shorten, rearrange, edit, or establish an official governmental version of them.

Once government mandates a sacred text, government must decide:

Which biblical wording will be used?
Which religious numbering will be followed?
Which portions will be included?
Which portions will be omitted?
Which translation will become official?
Which interpretation will be publicly favored?

This is especially serious for Seventh-day Adventists and other seventh-day Sabbathkeepers.

The fourth commandment does not merely say to remember a Sabbath in the abstract. It declares:

"But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God."
—Exodus 20:10, KJV

A government-selected abbreviation may retain the command to remember the Sabbath while omitting the words that identify the day God blessed and sanctified.

The state should not be hostile to the Bible. Students must remain free to read Scripture, express their faith, form religious clubs, pray voluntarily, and discuss religious beliefs. But voluntary religious expression by students is not the same as government selecting and mandating an official sacred text.

The state must not become an editor, interpreter, or administrator of God's law.

Religious liberty must protect the minority

The report correctly states that religious liberty must belong to everyone or it belongs to no one. I strongly affirm that principle.

Religious liberty is not measured by how government treats a popular religious majority. It is measured by whether government protects the person whose conscience differs from the majority.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I am particularly concerned that a growing alliance between civil government and dominant Christian institutions could eventually create governmental preference for Sunday observance.

This draft report is not itself a Sunday law. Nevertheless, the principles established here matter. Once government is encouraged to support religion, fund religion, promote sacred texts, expand political activity through churches, and build a "bridge" between church and state, the constitutional resistance to religious legislation is weakened.

A government that may support religious observance can eventually decide which observance it will support.

The final report should explicitly affirm that government must not establish an economic, political, employment, educational, or civil preference for Sunday, Saturday, Friday, or any other religious day.

Religious accommodation must be based upon individual conscience—not upon the selection of a nationally preferred sacred day.

Requested revisions

I respectfully request that the Commission revise the final report to:

1. Remove the declaration that church and state “strengthen and support one another.”
2. Reject the “bridge between church and state” metaphor and affirm a clear institutional boundary between civil and religious authority.
3. Distinguish the protection of religious institutions from governmental financial partnership with them.
4. Acknowledge that government funding may bring government regulation, dependence, and doctrinal pressure.
5. Protect parental educational freedom without creating financial mechanisms that could place religious schools under governmental control.
6. Preserve the freedom of pastors to preach moral and biblical truth while maintaining the nonpartisan character of tax-exempt churches and charitable ministries.
7. Oppose government selection, abbreviation, editing, or mandated display of an official version of sacred Scripture.
8. Expressly protect minority religions, nonreligious citizens, seventh-day Sabbathkeepers, and every individual conscience.
9. Reject all civil, economic, or governmental preference for a particular day of religious observance.
10. Affirm that religious faith must remain voluntary and must never be advanced through civil coercion.

Conclusion

I am not asking government to silence Christianity.

I am asking government not to control it.

I am not asking Christians to withdraw from public life.

I am asking that political power not be joined to ecclesiastical influence.

I am not opposing religious liberty.

I am defending the conditions without which religious liberty cannot survive.

Faith cannot be produced by legislation. Worship cannot be made genuine through public funding. Conversion cannot be accomplished through political influence. Love for God cannot be compelled by civil authority.

The state that possesses enough power to advance religion today possesses enough power to redefine and suppress it tomorrow.

The government best protects religion when it protects the conscience of every person while refusing to finance, edit, favor, administer, or enforce religious belief.

Respectfully submitted,

Charmaine Syvertson
Christian nonprofit ministry leader
Seventh-day Adventist

From: Jon Syvertson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to rlc report
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 00:23:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am Commenting on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
To the Members of the Commission,
Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report. I appreciate the Commission's recognition that religious liberty is a foundational American principle. The freedom to worship according to conscience—or not to worship at all—is a gift that has distinguished our nation and benefited people of every faith.
I write as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who deeply values both religious liberty and the Constitution of the United States. My church has long advocated for the protection of conscience for all people, not merely for our own members. We believe genuine faith can never be produced by civil authority, but only by the free conviction of the heart.
I commend the Commission's desire to protect the free exercise of religion and to ensure that people of faith are not discriminated against because of their sincerely held beliefs. Those are worthy and constitutional goals.
At the same time, I respectfully urge the Commission to exercise great caution regarding the relationship between religion and civil government. The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and guards against governmental establishment or preference of religion. These two principles work together to preserve liberty of conscience for every American.
I encourage the Commission to explicitly affirm that no religion should receive preferential treatment under the law, whether directly or indirectly. Government should neither favor one denomination over another nor elevate one religious tradition above another. Equal protection of conscience is the surest safeguard of religious liberty.
I am especially concerned that the federal government never endorse or encourage legislation that gives preferential legal status to one particular day of worship or day of rest. Whether Saturday, Sunday, or any other day, such matters belong to the individual conscience and to God—not to civil authority. Americans observe different days according to their faith, while others observe none. Our Constitution protects them all equally.
History demonstrates that governments often begin with the sincere desire to support religion but gradually move toward using civil authority in matters of conscience. Our nation's founders wisely sought to prevent that danger by protecting both religious freedom and limited government. I respectfully ask the Commission to reaffirm that religious observance must always remain voluntary and that no citizen should ever receive legal advantage or disadvantage because of the day he or she chooses to worship or rest.
The strength of the United States has never been that it promotes one religion over another. Rather, its strength has been protecting the God-given liberty of every person to follow conscience without coercion.
Thank you for your service and for considering these comments. My hope is that your final report will strengthen religious liberty while preserving the constitutional protections that have allowed people of every faith—including my own—to worship freely for nearly 250 years.
Respectfully,

Jon Syvertson

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

From: Goldendale Adventist School <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Goldendale Adventist School
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 02:54:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

On behalf of Goldendale Adventist School, we respectfully submit this public comment regarding the draft report released on June 26, 2026.

As a community of faith, we are deeply concerned by several recommendations contained in the draft report that we believe could weaken the constitutional principles that have protected religious liberty in the United States for generations. We respectfully urge the Commission to reconsider recommendations that would diminish the historic separation of church and state. The draft report is open for public comment through July 13, 2026.

Our primary concerns include:
The Separation of Church and State
We believe that maintaining an institutional separation between church and state best protects the free exercise of religion for people of every faith and for those of no faith. Government should neither establish religion nor interfere with the sincere exercise of religion. These twin principles have enabled religious diversity to flourish in the United States.

The Johnson Amendment
We respectfully oppose the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment. Rather than removing its protections, we believe it should continue to be enforced to preserve the spiritual mission and integrity of religious institutions by limiting partisan political activity.

Government Funding of Religious Activities
We oppose expanding government funding for religious nonprofit activities, religious education, and religious organizations. Faith communities are strongest when they remain free from government dependence or influence.

Government Neutrality Toward Religion
We support a government that remains neutral toward religion—neither favoring nor opposing any faith. Equal treatment under the law is essential to protecting the freedom of conscience guaranteed to every American.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a long history of defending religious liberty for everyone, not merely for those who share our beliefs. Our pioneers understood that genuine faith cannot be compelled by civil authority. History repeatedly demonstrates that when church and state become closely united, government eventually assumes authority over matters of conscience and religious doctrine. Religious liberty is best preserved when government protects every person's right to worship—or not worship—according to the dictates of conscience.

On a personal note, I grew up listening and reading a library of books of Christians who had lived in countries where religious liberty did not exist. They shared firsthand accounts of being denied the freedom to worship their Creator according to the convictions of their conscience. Many endured ridicule, imprisonment, physical abuse, and emotional persecution simply because they believed in Jesus Christ. Some faithfully stood for their convictions despite torture or even death.

Every one of them concluded with profound gratitude for the religious liberty enjoyed in the United States. Their testimonies impressed upon me that freedom of conscience is among our nation's greatest blessings.

Our country has been richly blessed because, throughout much of its history, the government has not attempted to control the God-given conscience of its citizens. This freedom allows faith to be sincere rather than compelled.

As a student, I also learned about early colonial America, where individuals were fined, imprisoned, whipped, banished, or placed in the stocks because they differed from the beliefs of the established church. These painful chapters of history remind us why the founders sought constitutional protections that would prevent government from establishing religion or controlling matters of conscience.

James Madison wrote that religion "must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man." Thomas Jefferson likewise affirmed that civil government should not compel or interfere with religious belief. Their shared conviction was that freedom of conscience is a natural right that government exists to protect, not to direct.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the constitutional principles that have made the United States a beacon of religious liberty throughout the world. By maintaining a healthy distinction between the responsibilities of church and state, our nation can continue to safeguard the God-given freedom of conscience for every citizen, regardless of religious belief.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this public comment.

Respectfully,

Goldendale Adventist School
PII

From: Bruno Lourenco <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on the Importance of Church-State Separation and Religious Liberty
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 07:51:57 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: Grey_Simple_Business_Email_Signature-5.png

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding any recommendation that would weaken the historic principle of the separation of church and state.

As an American and a Christian, I believe that religious liberty flourishes when government neither establishes religion nor interferes with the free exercise of faith. The role of government is to protect the rights and freedoms of every citizen—not to promote, favor, or direct religious belief or practice.

This principle has long been cherished by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our commitment to religious liberty extends not only to our own faith, but also to the rights of people of every religion and those of no religion at all. Genuine faith cannot be compelled by law; it must be the result of a free and informed conscience.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when church and state become closely intertwined, both religious freedom and authentic faith suffer. The constitutional protections embodied in the First Amendment have helped make the United States a place where people of diverse beliefs can live together in peace and mutual respect.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve and defend these foundational principles and to avoid recommendations that could erode the religious freedom of future generations.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Danbury-Bethel SDA
Waterbury SDA

Bruno Lourenco
Pastor
[redacted]
[redacted]
www.dbsda.org

From: Remy Guenin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: Cathy Anderson <[redacted]>, Florence Driscoll <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Seperation of church and state - Remy J Guenin
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 09:23:09 -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.

Kind Regards,
Remy J Guenin
Hendersonville, NC

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
Ephesians 2:10

From: Judy Woodworth <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and state
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 11:12:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear committee

I object to the notion that church and state should not stay separate.

For freedom to be available for all there has to be a separate power to protect minorities. History is rampant with examples of the abuse of power. Many came to America to flee religious persecution by the state. We have the dark ages before the Protestant revolution where millions gave their lives for faith.

In the current state of legal protection we can go after those who abuse animals and humans on a civil court level, that freedom is at stake.

We need to clean house and uphold justice in America. Funding religious institutions has a tendency to put a strangle hold on teaching flexibility. Standardization makes it possible to control the curriculum, rewrite history from any perspective those in power see fit.

We have faught in this country for freedom for 250 years now, God has blessed with revivals through our history. Freedom for all means not concentrating power in any one majority.

You have 2 worldwide educational systems not supported by government money in the USA Seventh Day Adventist and Catholics. Biblical Sabbath separates the the systems. Persecution still happens in many parts of the world. It will happen here too if the separation of church and state should fail to be protected.

I am a believer who is at church 5 days a week. Praying for God's protection of laws and order.

Sincerely Judy Woodworth

From: adeli galvis <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 12:07:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear United States Department of Justice,

I am writing to express my support for the protection of religious liberty as guaranteed by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

The First Amendment declares

These words protect one of the most precious freedoms enjoyed by every American: the right to worship God according to the convictions of one's own conscience. They also affirm that the government should not establish, favor, or impose any religion or religious practice. Matters of faith belong to each individual and should remain free from government coercion or interference.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, my faith is based on the Bible. I believe that God's Word teaches that the seventh day of the week, Saturday, is the true biblical Sabbath. Genesis 2:2–3 records that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day at Creation. Exodus 20:8–11, in the Fourth Commandment, instructs us to "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." Jesus Himself kept the seventh-day Sabbath during His earthly ministry, and nowhere in Scripture does the Bible change the Sabbath from the seventh day to Sunday.

Because of these sincerely held religious convictions, I observe the seventh-day Sabbath and worship on Saturday. I respectfully ask that the constitutional rights of all Americans be protected, including the right to observe the Sabbath according to their faith without pressure, discrimination, or government mandates that conflict with their religious beliefs.

The First Amendment was established to ensure that government neither establishes religion nor interferes with the free exercise of religion. This principle has helped preserve religious freedom for people of every faith and those of no faith at all. It is essential that this constitutional protection continue to be upheld for present and future generations.

Thank you for your dedication to protecting the constitutional rights and religious liberty of all Americans. I respectfully ask that the Department of Justice continue to defend the freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment and ensure that every citizen may worship according to the dictates of conscience.

Respectfully,

Adeli Galvis

From: Moises da Costa <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment: free exercise of religion for Americans of every faith
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 12:22:22 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for your labor on behalf of religious liberty. As a Seventh-day Adventist, I warmly commend several elements of the draft report: robust workplace religious accommodation (essential to Sabbath-keepers like me), conscience protections in health care, defense of houses of worship, and streamlined religious accommodation in the military. These strengthen the free exercise of religion for Americans of every faith, and I support them.

Precisely because I cherish free exercise, I must respectfully oppose the recommendations that would erode its twin safeguard, the Establishment Clause: the proposed reinterpretation of church-state separation, support for mandated Ten Commandments displays in public schools, and expanded government-sponsored religious instruction.

The two religion clauses are one shield. Non-establishment is what makes free exercise secure: a government with no authority to sponsor religion has no authority to suppress it. A. T. Jones, testifying before the Senate in 1888, stated the principle on which my church still stands: “Civil government is civil, and has nothing to do in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way.” History confirms it everywhere it has been tested — from fourth-century Rome, to colonial New England, to the Sunday-law prosecutions that sent members of my own church to chain gangs in the 1890s. The state that favors the majority’s faith today acquires the precedent to burden the minority’s faith tomorrow.

I ask the Commission to finalize a report that advances every free exercise protection in the draft while removing every measure that entangles government with religion. That combination — and only that combination — is full religious liberty.

Respectfully,

Moises da Costa

Apopka, FL

From: Philip Wheeler <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concerning the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 12:42:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

To those to whom it may concern,

I was made aware and read part of the religious liberty commission.

I am emailing because I both support and disagree with the commission report in the parts I have read.

First where I agree. We as a nation have lost the right to share and live the Gospel in many ways. Atheism is the religion of the bottomless pit. Ie the belief in the void. But it is still a belief, however based on evidence they may claim. It should be treated as such. We should protect the religious liberty of Christianity as well as all other religions that share our great nation.

However where I disagree is in the solution. To replace the "wall of separation" with a bridge. I am not a lawyer. I won't argue interpretation. But I will present simple historical facts.

1. Historically religion in the hands of a well meaning state is the greatest cause of evils of government upon the people. From the Roman empire against the Christians, to Communist atheism against all other religions. The results are always the same.

2. The road to persecution often starts with well meaning attempts to fix inequality. The French revolution being an excellent example.

3. Once the path has begun it is almost impossible to stop the results. (Honestly I can not think of a time where it wasn't fulfilled except the fits and starts of our own country where we have had states and times where attempts were made but have by seemingly a miracle been diverted back into a track of moderation.)

I would ask that instead of a bridge we shore up the wall by closing the gate marked "atheism" that is wide open in the wall.

I realize that this may fall on deaf ears. Indeed my understanding of Bible prophecy is that just as there was a power mentioned in Daniel and revelation that welded power for 1260 years of persecution in the name of Christ. That by the end it will happen again. But we all have a choice. Do we support and push the path to giving church and state power to each other? Or do we restore the breaches in the walls. Hold the line. And pray that God may hold back the winds.

Brothers and Sisters of faith in the government of this great nation. Let not the standard of religious liberty fall on your watch!

To all others that may read this, I may disagree with your religion but I believe in a God who respects your right to accept or reject Him. That is why He died to save you, because He didn't force you to believe.

To all in government who may do so, please do not build a bridge, by giving government money to religious work, nor by letting churches have a more direct voice in government. But instead make the lines more distinct. That in matters of civil morality the government may act but in matters of the conscience it has no rights. Likewise the church may speak to the heart of moral issues but not to the politics.

Sincerely, a concerned Christian citizen of the United States of America. Concerning my faith; I am a Seventh Day Adventist Protestant Christian. (By God's grace I will not hide it, nor I will force it.)

Philip Daniel Wheeler

From: "Donna" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 13:20:44 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Committee I agree with the Pillars of Freedom Comments and please ask that you implement them. Churches, especially the Christian Church, needs to be free. Please stop funding non-profit religious organizations since there are restrictions attached to the money. ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) has accepted government funding for years and cannot even hand out religious material while performing community services even after disasters. The government restrictions on the funding completely eliminates our churches mission to spread the gospel of Jesus. Our church needs to stop accepting the funding and the government needs to stop providing it. I believe if there is not separation of Church and State, it will eventually lead to the state endorsing one religion over the others and specifically one denomination over others even in its own religion. And I believe that will lead to discrimination and persecution of even the other denominations in its own religion. jDonna D. Smith Magalia, California

From: barriosg87 <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Pillar of Freedom
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 14:02:00 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

I agree with Pillar of Freedom.

Sent from my Galaxy

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

[redacted]

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

PII

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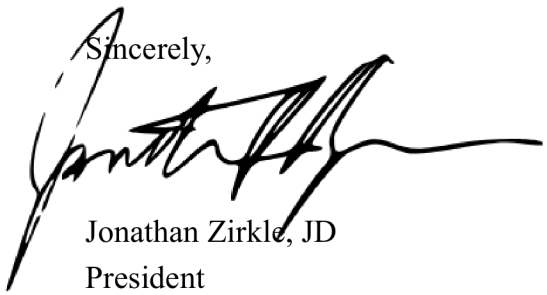
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

DOJ-RLC Comment-019774

From: Michael <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Most of the report - Michael J Long
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 15:16:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greetings,

I am writing to submit this public comment as an American citizen who deeply values the freedoms protected by the United States Constitution, especially the free exercise of religion guaranteed by the First Amendment.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, my faith is central to my family's daily life. I am grateful to live in a nation where individuals are free to practice their religion according to their sincerely held beliefs without unnecessary government interference. I also believe that protecting both religious liberty and the appropriate separation between government and religious institutions helps preserve these freedoms for people of all faiths and those with no religious affiliation.

For these reasons, I respectfully object to the following proposals contained in the report:

- Funding religious nonprofit activities with public funds.
- Funding religious education and religious clubs on public school campuses.
- Repealing the Johnson Amendment, which limits the political activities of tax-exempt churches and other charitable organizations.

I respectfully request that the Johnson Amendment remain in effect and be fully enforced. In my view, maintaining these protections helps preserve public trust in both government and religious institutions while safeguarding the religious liberty that Americans have long cherished.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for public participation in this process. I appreciate your consideration of my comments and your commitment to hearing the views of the American people.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael J. Long

From: Patricia Evans <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 15:52:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a faithful member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I'd like to voice my opinion on the report and intentions of the Religious Liberty Commission.

From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, religious liberty is a God-given right that flourishes best when both church and state remain within their respective spheres of authority. Adventists have historically defended the free exercise of religion for people of **all faiths**—or **no faith**—not because we oppose religion in public life, but because history and Scripture demonstrate the dangers that arise when civil government becomes an instrument for advancing or enforcing religious beliefs.

The recent Religious Liberty Commission established by the Trump administration states that it seeks to strengthen religious freedom and has recommended a closer relationship between religion and government, with some commissioners arguing against the traditional understanding of the separation of church and state. The Commission's draft report proposes a greater role for religion in public institutions and government policy.

While Seventh-day Adventists strongly support genuine religious liberty, they have historically distinguished between **protecting religious freedom** and **granting government authority in religious matters**. Adventists affirm that the government should protect every citizen's right to worship according to their conscience but should never promote one religion, compel religious observance, or favor one faith tradition over another.

This conviction is rooted in Scripture. Jesus declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21), recognizing distinct spheres of civil and divine authority. When the Sanhedrin attempted to restrict the preaching of the gospel, the apostles replied, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), illustrating that civil authority has limits when it intrudes upon conscience.

The prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation further shape my Adventist understanding. Daniel 3 depicts a government compelling worship through civil decree, while Revelation 13 portrays a future union of religious and political powers that enforces worship under threat of economic sanctions and death. These passages have led Adventists to conclude that religious coercion is contrary to God's character and prophetic warnings.

Ellen G. White (prophet and co-founder of the SDA Church) echoed this understanding when she wrote:

> "The union of the church with the state, be the degree ever so slight, while it may appear to bring the world nearer to the church, does in reality bring the church nearer to the world." (*The Great Controversy*, p. 297.)

She consistently warned that whenever civil power is employed to advance religious objectives, liberty of conscience is endangered and **sincere** faith is replaced by external conformity.

Therefore, from an Adventist perspective, any movement—regardless of political party or administration—that encourages government to move beyond protecting religious liberty into promoting or privileging religion should be approached with discernment. The issue is not whether Christianity should influence individual believers' moral lives; Christians are called to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:13–16). Rather, the concern is whether the state assumes authority in matters that belong to God alone.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has long maintained that authentic religious liberty protects the rights of all people equally. Government serves its God-ordained role by preserving justice, peace, and freedom of

conscience, while the church fulfills its mission through persuasion, proclamation of the gospel, and Christlike service—not through the power of the state. This principle remains central to Adventist theology and to its prophetic understanding of last-day events.

Respectfully, yours in Christ

From: Jackie Fortune <jackie4tune@gmail.com>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 16:09:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

As a Christian and as an American citizen I would like to express that I do not agree with the Religious Liberty Commission's declaration that there is no separation of church and state. God does not force us to have faith in Him and operates on the principles of Love, Trust, and Freedom. God does not want people to serve him out of coercion but out of love. Furthermore, different denominations interpret the Bible differently and hold different values depending on their interpretation. Because of this each individual needs to have the freedom to interpret the Bible for themselves.

Thomas Jefferson explains it this way:

"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."

I believe that government has no authority to tell you what to believe, or how to worship, and that government lacks authority over religion.

I am also a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our co-founder Ellen White said:

"We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. Fervent, effectual prayer should be ascending to heaven that this calamity may be deferred until we can accomplish the work which has so long been neglected. Let there be most earnest prayer and then let us work in harmony with our prayers." — Testimonies for the Church 5:714 (1889).

"We cannot labor to please men who will use their influence to repress religious liberty...The people of God are not to vote to place such men in office, for when they do this they are partakers with them of the sins which they commit while in office." — Fundamentals of Christian Education, 475.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Fortune

From: Ivony Sierra-Martin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State: Ivony Sierra-Martin
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 16:42:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I first want to say that it is a privilege to be a citizen of the United States of America. A country that was built on freedom in every way, especially the freedom of religion. It is disturbing to hear that our government, today, in the US, founded on freedom, is finding ways to dismantle the very essence of what freedom of religion is, separation of church and state.

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. God is not looking for people that worship Him out of force, like robots. That isn't genuine faith and love. We all are individuals, with the liberty of conscience to choose God or not. If this idea of bridging church and states moves forward, it will go against God's character and will reveal more of the dark spiritual principalities that are at work.

I know this is not the first time this issue has occurred. We see in history, nothing is new under the sun, that when church and state come together only disaster comes from it. Our greatest reminder was in the dark ages. The way to win souls is not through legislation, but through personal connection with people. Showing the love of Jesus will win souls more than legislating that cannot penetrate the heart, but harden the heart more.

Quotes:

1. “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.

[*Adams submitted and signed the Treaty of Tripoli, 1797*]”
— John Adams, Thoughts on government applicable to the present state of the American colonies.: Philadelphia, Printed by John Dunlap, M,DCC,LXXXVI.

2. “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute - where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote - where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference - and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish - where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source - where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or

indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials - and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.

[Remarks to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, September 12 1960]"
– John F. Kennedy

This country was never a christian nation. But it sure was founded on the collective thought to allow people to choose for themselves whom they will serve and follow based on a christian principle.

Jesus Christ died for every person and invites all to follow Him, yet he never forces anyone to worship or obey Him. Love cannot exist where there is coercion. God gives every individual the freedom to choose (Joshua 24:15; Revelation 22:17). Christ says, "If any man will come after me…" (Matthew 16:24). Satan, however, works through deception and force.

The bible warns that a time is coming when civil and religious powers will unite. In Revelation 13, the second beast arises from the earth, speaks "as a dragon" (Revelation 13:11), and "causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast" (Revelation 13:12). It also "causeth all" to receive the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16).

The first beast of Revelation 13 is understood by historic Protestant interpretation to represent the papal system centered in Rome, a religious-political power that exercised civil authority and persecuted dissenters during the Middle Ages. The second beast is understood to represent the United States, which began with lamb-like principles of civil and religious liberty but will eventually "speak as a dragon" by using civil power to enforce religious observance. Revelation 13:14 says this second beast makes "an image to the beast" that is, it forms a system that mirrors the union of church and state represented by the first beast. In this understanding, the "image" is not the Vatican itself, but a replica of the same kind of church-state union, where civil government enforces religious requirements of what we flee from.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we recognize the importance of protecting liberty of conscience for all people. Scripture foretells that a time is coming when civil power and religious authority will unite in ways that challenge God's faithful people.

"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…"
— Revelation 13:12 (KJV)

As Christians and as citizens who value the freedoms upon which this nation was founded, we should oppose any effort by any party or religious body to compel worship, punish conscience, or interfere with a person's beliefs. Whether the coercion favors Christianity, another religion, or no religion at all, liberty of conscience must be protected. To remove the wall of separation of church and state you will place religion over the whole country. This is contrary to the principles embedded in our Constitution and contrary to the example of Jesus Christ, who calls people through love, truth, and conviction not through civil power or coercion. A government that protects the freedom to worship according to conscience reflects the principle that faith must be freely chosen, while a government that compels worship departs from both the constitutional safeguards established by the Founders and the biblical pattern of voluntary allegiance to God.

Sincerely,

Ivony Sierra-Martin

Bremen, Indiana

From: Valarie Arnett Hartsfield <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State- Arnett L. Hartsfield, III
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 16:47:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I will make every effort to keep my comments brief. Let me start by saying that I am a born again Christian. In 1989 God called me out of the darkness and into his marvelous light. I am also a retired teacher and student of history. I am shocked and saddened that after 250 years, this administration is attempting to unite church and state, undoing the wisdom of our Founding Fathers. All one has to do is look at the history of uniting church with state to see it inevitably leads to favoritism and persecution. During the Dark Ages it led to an inquisition where "heretics" were persecuted and killed by the papacy in the millions! The church of England persecuted the Puritans which led to Separatists, Pilgrims, and Puritans seeking "religious liberty" in America. The union of church and state "ALWAYS" leads to persecution.

Objections to funding religious non-profit activities and schools

The strength and power of the church is the love of Christ. When that love is lacking, she turns to the power of the state. State funding of religious activities will inevitably put the state in the position of deciding which 'religious activities' are valid and which are not. Jesus said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's", Matthew 22:21 . He also pointed out that, "My kingdom is not of this world", John 18:36.
In the public school classroom it is important to respect the religion of the various students found there. As a Seventh day Adventist teaching at public school with predominantly Catholic students (and staff for that matter) I was careful not to interject religious biases into my teaching even though I had a captive audience. Part of religious liberty is respecting a person's right to worship (or not) according to the dictates of their conscience.

Objections to repealing the Johnson Amendment

The Johnson Amendment restricts a church's political activities. Politics has no place in church- none! Repealing the Johnson amendment will not only weaken the gospel message but lead to further polarization of a nation already divided. The church must be united by the Holy Spirit according to the word of God, and not along political lines. I know that many of the advocates of this are well-meaning, but it will have disastrous effects once implemented. It sounds good, but consider history, I beg you. On the contrary, I request that the Johnson amendment be fully enforced.

Preferential treatment of the nation of Israel

I object to the special treatment given Jewish people and the state of Israel based on a futuristic interpretation of bible prophecy. This special treatment is based on a false understanding of who Israel is today. Without getting into a full blown bible study, I understand that "Abraham's seed" and "the Israel of God" are those who have been converted and accepted Christ as their saviour- this does not include the nation of Israel (except perhaps Messianic Jews), with all due respect. And I resent being labeled anti-semetic for holding this view. I consider myself, and all those who follow Christ today, to be the Israel of the new testament. I'm sure there are a majority who do not share this opinion, and this highlights the importance of keeping church and state separate, to protect minority views.

In closing, I would further state that I am a keeper of the seventh day Sabbath, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. This too is a minority view and I fear that it will lead to persecution if church and state unite. Nevertheless, if such should come to pass, "we ought to obey God rather than man."

Sincerely,

Arnett L. Hartsfield, III

Springville, CA

From: Zach Vincent <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Commission's Report
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 17:11:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Members of the White House Religious Liberties Commission,

I am writing this to you too express my concerns about your policy recommendations. Please do not recommended ANY policies that bring the government and religion together.
History clearly shows us that any time a governmental power combines with any religious group or faith, persecution, injustice, and evil always follows. Whether it's a Muslim country persecuting Christians, an atheistic country persecuting Jews, or a Catholic country persecuting Protestants, the commonality between then is a government overstepping into the real of conscience.
I recognize the current administrations favor of Christianity, but Jesus never taught his followers to make the government enforce the faith; just the opposite, He said His kingdom is not of this world. The day this country makes laws or policies bringing together the government and religion will be the day freedom dies.

I say all this as a Christian myself, particularly as a Seventh-day Adventist. The government has no business in the affairs of religion. God is watching this Religious Liberties Commission, do not sin against God or your fellow man by recommending policy that causes the state and church to unite. God does not force our conscience and so if this Commission recommends that policies be made that does force our conscience, it will be actively fighting against God. Please, do not recommended ANY policies that bridge the government and religion.
Sincerely, Zachary of North Carolina, a concerned Christian and citizen

From: Thomas C Phillips II <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: The draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 17:20:10 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

RE: The draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

I agree with PILLAR OF FREEDOM's comments (Attached). **Please implement them**!

Sincerely,

Thomas C. Phillips II
Concerned American Citizen / Bible believing Christian

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

PII

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

PII

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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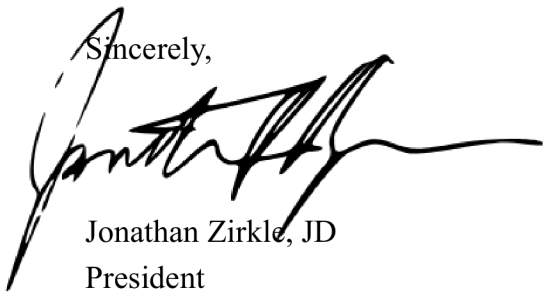
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

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DOJ-RLC Comment-019797

From: David Trott <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - REligious Liberty Commission - by David Trott
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 17:55:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Sir/Madam:

I object to some parts of the Religious Liberty Commissions report to the President. The following are my objections and recommendations 1. Do not repeal the Johnson Amendment. In fact, I request that the Johnson Amendment be enforced to its full extent. 2. Do not fund religious organizations that engage in political activities. 3. I object to the claim that separation of church and state never was the intent of the founding fathers. On the contrary, one of the principal tenants of the founders was separation of church and state. History has borne out the dire consequences of uniting church and state. Whenever that has been attempted, the results are great loss of personal and religious freedom.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, we have long championed the right of all religions to function according to their conscience. Because if all do not have freedom, none have freedom.

Thank you for considering these comments.

David Trott, Inman, South Carolina

From: Janice Wolfe <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty.
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 18:02:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello. My name is Janice Wolfe.

I am writing to you concerning the matter of Religious Liberty.
I was raised a Seventh Day Adventist, and so was my mother. When I was 19 years old I joined the U.S. Navy because I believed that it was my duty. However, after a couple of years on the ship, I started believing that it was my duty to observe the Sabbath. I decided to get out of active duty and serve the rest of my time in the Reserves. (I served active reserves and inactive resrves). I served the Navy 4 years active, and 4 years reserve, all combined for 8 years.
I still believe that it was my duty to enlist.

I believe that everyone should have ability to worship our Lord Jesus Christ as feel led to.

Thank you for your time and work.

Sincerely,

Janice Wolfe

From: Brandon Lampton <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 18:06:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

I’m a faithful member and Elder of the Seventh day Adventist Church, and I’m respectfully submitting a response to “the Religious liberty commission report “

We as Adventist believe in the separation of church and state. “Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar’s and to God the things that are Gods.”

I respectfully and peacefully protest the idea to join church and state, to having the church dictate what the laws of the land are. I believe that to put a church in charge of the state only ultimately leads to one very dangerous outcome for the people that go against that which the Christian Government dictates how I am to worship my God.

Not saying that’s what is happening now but that is ultimately where the road leads. We will be plunging back into the Roman dark ages.

I quote from Martin Luther

"I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

Thank you for you time and pray that you consider the matter amen 🙏

From: Debbie Craft <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state Debbie Craft
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 18:14:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear leaders of the religious liberty commission:

I am very concerned that you want to take away the wall of separation of church and state and build a “bridge” between the two.
There are many of us Americans who know this is not a good idea at all.
I was raised in the seventh-day Adventist Church and we were told a long time ago by our profit that this would happen and how we would lose our religious liberty in this country.
I believe that ALL Religions should have the freedom of religion not just Christians, our country was founded on this principle and I am pleading with you to stop going down this road where many of us will lose our religious liberty!

Sincerely
Debbie Craft
Fruitland Park, Florida

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: Sheryl Mcalpin <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Rights of the USA people
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 18:17:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

I'm Sheryl McAlpin[redacted]
I am a Seventh Day Adventist and Worship on GOD'S HOLY SABBATH. The government has no right or power to change the Constitution which we have live by since 1787. It was written to all was written to always allow the American people to our freedom, and never to be forced by the government to change.
Sincerely Sheryl McAlpin

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: GC Tours <[redacted]>

To: [redacted]

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PLEASE KEEP THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE DISTINCT!

Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 18:21:54 -0400

Importance: Normal

My name is Susie Burdick and I live in Dunlap TN. I am a Seventh-Day Adventist and I love Jesus with all my heart and I love my country, but Jesus comes first in my life. Please do not demolish the wall between church and state because that is dangerous to everyone's religious liberty. It can destroy everyone's religion. Thank you for listening.

From: "George E. Gilbert" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT--SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE--GEORGE E. GILBERT
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 19:08:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and a citizen of the United States of America. Born and raised in America. I have been so proud of our country and what our Constitution of the United States of America states.

Our founders and their families suffered greatly for what they believed. My wife and I are children of the Mayflower passengers. My wife's family, who were Separatists, boarded the Mayflower in search of freedom from oppression of state sponsored religion. About half of the passengers on the Mayflower died the first year in America. They lost their lives while hoping for a better land with freedom.

Should there be a wall of separation between governments and churches? Oh yes, history shows us in the Old World that many of the old wars were over religion. Roger Williams from Rhode Island hoped and taught that the state government should do its business without regard to any religious institution's belief's or rules. America is not a theocracy. We don't have a state sponsored church. We are FREE. We are the light on a candlestick. A light of Freedom.

I include a copy of a letter that John Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson, “Checks and Balances Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unbalanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!”

The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Thank you,

George Gilbert
Scottsdale, Arizona

From: Uriel Vidal <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Uriel Vidal
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 19:11:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a Seventh-day Adventist. For my church, religious persecution in America is not a hypothesis — it is family history. It was persecuted under religious laws *in America*; do not rebuild that road.

Between 1885 and 1896, scores of Adventists were prosecuted under state Sunday laws. Men were fined, imprisoned, and sentenced to labor on chain gangs alongside criminals — for the crime of quietly plowing their fields or working in their shops on Sunday, after having rested on the Bible Sabbath. These laws were defended, then as now, as expressions of the nation's Christian morality.

On Dec. 13, 1888, our spokesman A. T. Jones testified before the Senate against a national Sunday-rest bill. In the published edition of his argument, he warned even the religious majority that supported it: "No man can allow any legislation in behalf of the religion, or the religious observances, in which he himself believes, without forfeiting his own religious freedom." That principle — not hostility to faith — is why we have defended the separation of church and state for 140 years, through the *American Sentinel* of Jones's day and *Liberty* magazine in ours.

I commend the report's support for workplace religious accommodation, which protects Seventh-day Sabbath-keepers, and its concern for conscience rights. But I urge the Commission to reconsider the recommendations that would weaken the Establishment Clause, mandate religious displays in schools, and expand government-sponsored religious instruction. Laws favoring majority religious practice always fall hardest on religious minorities — we bear the scars that prove it.

Two books that state this case beyond controversy are:

- *The Two Republics* (A. T. Jones, 1891)
- *The Rights of the People* (A. T. Jones, 1895)

One example from the appendix of The Two Republics itself ("How Sunday Laws Are Enforced") shows how these prosecutions singled us out. Elder J. W. Scoles, a Seventh-day Adventist minister, had spent about two hours painting a strip of his own congregation's meeting-house at Springdale, Arkansas, on a Sunday in April 1885, "clear out of sight of all public roads." What followed before the Grand Jury is on record:

> "At the fall term of the Circuit Court held at Fayetteville, Mr. J. A. Armstrong, of Springdale, was summoned before the Grand Jury. He was asked if he knew of any violations of the Sunday law. He said he did.
>
> "Grand Jury.—'Who are they?'
>
> "Armstrong.—'The 'Frisco Railroad is running trains every Sunday.'
>
> "G. J.—'Do you know of any others?'
>
> "A.—'Yes; the hotels of this place are open and do a full run of business on Sunday, as on other days.'

"G. J.—'Do you know of any others?'

"A.—'Yes, sir; the drug stores and barber shops all keep open, and do business every Sunday.'

"G. J.—'Do you know of any others?'

"A.—'Yes; the livery-stables do more business on Sunday than on any other day of the week.'

"After several repetitions of the same form of question and answer, in relation to other lines of business, this question was reached:—

"G. J.—'Do you know of any Seventh-day Adventists who ever work on Sunday?'

"A.—'Yes, sir.'

"After getting from the witness the names of his brethren, indictments were found against five persons, all of whom were Seventh-day Adventists. Elder Scoles was one of the five."

Not one railroad official, hotel keeper, druggist, barber, or stable owner was indicted. Mr. Scoles was convicted, and on October 30, 1886, the Arkansas Supreme Court affirmed the judgment, with nearly a score of like cases against Adventists waiting on the decision. (A. T. Jones, *The Two Republics*, 1891, Appendix, pp. 877–878)

These quotes are eternally relevant:

"Leave the matter of religion to the family circle, the church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. *Keep the Church and State forever separate.*" President Ulysses S. Grant, Des Moines, Iowa (Sept. 29, 1875)

"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." James Madison, Virginia Ratifying Convention (June 12, 1788)

"Congress shall make no law respecting **an establishment of religion**, or prohibiting the **free exercise thereof**…" First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution

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

Respectfully, Uriel Vidal

From: Kevin Robert <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE / "BRIDGE NOT WALL" FRAMING – Kevin Robert
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 19:13:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:
I write as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor to comment on the draft report delivered to President Trump on June 26, 2026 — specifically its central proposal to reframe the First Amendment's religious liberty clause as a "bridge" between church and state rather than a "wall," and its recommendation that the Department of Justice issue guidance "clarifying" the Establishment Clause along these lines.
I want to be direct about where I'm standing: this comment is not offered on behalf of a religious minority hoping for a bigger seat at the table. It's offered because my own tradition has been here before, made the opposite argument, and I believe that argument still holds.
The precedent: 1888
In December 1888, my denomination's representative, A. T. Jones, testified before the U.S. Senate against Senator Henry Blair's National Sunday Rest Bill. Jones did not object to the bill because it targeted Sabbatarians. He objected to it on a narrower and, I think, more durable ground: civil government has no jurisdiction over what a person owes to God. It has full and proper jurisdiction over what people owe each other — the last six commandments, in the old language. The moment government reaches into the first four — worship, conscience, the internal relationship between a person and God — it has stepped outside its lawful territory, no matter how well-intentioned the reach.
Jones made a point of applying this consistently, even against his own interest. When Blair asked whether Jones would be satisfied by a law requiring seventh-day rest instead of Sunday rest, Jones said no — he would oppose that just as strongly, because the problem was never which day the government chose to enforce. The problem was that government had assumed the authority to enforce a day at all. A principle that only holds when it favors you isn't a principle. It's a preference wearing a principle's clothes.
That is the test I want to apply to this report, and I'd ask the Commission to apply it to itself.
Where the current report crosses that same line
The report's core move — arguing that "wall of separation" is not constitutional text and should be replaced with "bridge" language — sounds like a semantic correction. It isn't. A wall describes a jurisdictional boundary: government stays out of the territory that belongs to conscience and worship. A bridge describes two parties meeting in shared territory. Once the Establishment Clause is read as inviting government into religious territory rather than fencing it out of that territory, the practical result is that some government body ends up deciding what counts as legitimate religious expression, whose expression was "improperly" restricted, and whose complaint deserves a written 30-day response from a superior. That is Caesar adjudicating what belongs to God. Jones's answer to that, regardless of who controls Caesar's office at the time, was no — not because the goal is bad, but because the machinery itself is the wrong machinery for the job.
I'd also note, respectfully, that a commission composed almost entirely of one religious tradition producing guidance on what counts as proper religious expression is precisely the structural problem Jones was pointing at. It doesn't matter whether the tradition writing the guidance is mine or someone else's, or whether the current occupants of these offices mean well. The 1888 bill was written by people who sincerely believed they were protecting rest, family, and worship for the whole country. Jones's argument was that sincerity doesn't cure a jurisdictional problem. Once government holds the pen on what qualifies as legitimate religious practice, it has made itself the arbiter of religion — a role the First Amendment exists specifically to deny it, in either direction.
Why the timing matters
I'd ask the Commission to weigh this alongside the Heritage Foundation's January 2026 "Saving America by Saving the Family" report, which explicitly calls for restored blue laws and a "uniform day of rest" on Sundays, built on McGowan v. Maryland. That proposal is not part of this Commission's report, but it is moving in the same current, at the same moment, using the same "government should actively support religious practice" logic this report is laying groundwork for. Jones's warning about the Blair bill was never really about the specific bill — Blair's bill died, and a milder version came right behind it, deliberately reworded to survive the objections raised against the first. The danger, Jones said, was the precedent, not the paperwork. A "bridge" framework adopted now, however narrowly worded, is exactly the kind of foundation a

“uniform day of rest” bill would need to stand on later.

The ask

I’d ask the Commission to withdraw the “bridge not wall” reframing from the final report, and to preserve the Establishment Clause’s function as a jurisdictional boundary rather than an invitation to partnership. Protecting free exercise — which this report also does, and which I support — does not require dismantling the boundary that keeps government out of the business of defining, licensing, or “clarifying” what genuine religious expression looks like. The two goals are not in tension. Confusing them is exactly the error the Adventist community spent 1888 to 1890 trying to head off, and I don’t think the passage of time has made the underlying argument less true.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Robert

Pastor, Celebration Seventh-day Adventist Church

Celebration, FL

From: C Cobb <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 19:16:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission. As a Christian, I deeply value religious liberty and appreciate efforts to protect the free exercise of religion. At the same time, I have concerns regarding certain recommendations contained in the report.

First, I am concerned by the report's apparent rejection of the traditional understanding of the separation of church and state and its recommendation that the Department of Justice issue guidance reinterpreting that principle. While I recognize that the phrase "wall of separation" does not appear in the Constitution itself, the broader principle has historically served as an important safeguard for religious liberty in a religiously diverse nation. The Commission's draft report recommends a revised understanding of the relationship between religion and government and encourages greater integration of religious expression within public institutions.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I am particularly mindful that religious liberty protections are often most important for minority faith communities rather than religious majorities. The separation of church and state has helped ensure that no religious tradition receives governmental preference over others. If government institutions become more closely aligned with the beliefs or practices of a religious majority, minority groups may find themselves marginalized or pressured to conform. This concern extends not only to my own faith community but also to my Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and other religious minority neighbors and friends who I also wish to advocate for, as I believe Christ would. A system that protects the rights of the majority today must also protect the rights of minorities tomorrow.

Second, I am concerned about proposals encouraging expanded religious instruction and religious displays within public schools. The Commission has specifically identified voluntary prayer, religious instruction in public schools, and government religious displays as areas for expanded protection. While I strongly support the right of students to pray voluntarily and to express their faith freely, I believe parents should retain primary responsibility for the religious formation of their children.

As a Christian parent, I would want to be the one teaching my children about religious beliefs, practices, and convictions. Public schools serve families from many different religious backgrounds as well as families with no religious affiliation. The role of public education should be to provide an environment that respects all students equally rather than becoming a venue for promoting particular religious perspectives. Religious instruction is most appropriately carried out by parents, faith communities, and houses of worship.

At the same time, I wish to express support for the Commission's emphasis on conscience protections and religious accommodations, particularly in relation to vaccine mandates and similar policies. I believe decisions involving vaccination and other deeply personal medical interventions should be made by individuals according to their own informed judgment and conscience. In a free society, reasonable accommodations should be available whenever possible for those whose religious convictions or sincerely held beliefs lead them to make different medical decisions. Protecting freedom of conscience in these matters is consistent with the broader principle that government should respect the moral agency and religious convictions of its citizens.

In summary, I support efforts to strengthen protections for individual conscience and religious exercise. However, I urge the Commission to preserve the constitutional safeguards that have historically protected religious minorities and to exercise caution regarding proposals that would blur the distinction between religious institutions and government or expand religious instruction within public schools.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
C Cobb

From: TBear <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom - No Sunday Laws
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 19:20:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a Seventh-day Adventist christian and I am very concerned about some points that your commission is making. God does not force His religion on mankind. We should not attempt to force any religious beliefs on anyone either. I believe in religious freedom for everyone, even the belief to not have a religion at all. I especially do not believe that any government should create and enforce any religious laws of any form. To do so is not creating religious freedom. It will surely create a state of persecution such as described in the book of Revelation.

1) I ask that your commission does not recommend for the abolishment nor reinterpretation of the Johnson Amendment.
2) I ask that your commission does not recommend any form of Sunday worship laws be created.
3) I ask that your commission does not recommend for any state Blue Laws to be reinstated or enforced.

I pray that each and every person on this commission will truly humble themselves and ask for the leading of the Holy Spirit. I fear for the persecutions that will come upon this world due to your current commission recommendations if they stay unchanged.

Proverbs 14:12 and Proverbs 16:25
"There is a way that seems right to man, but the end thereof is the way of destruction."

John 16:2-3
"They will put you out of the churches; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me."

Sincerely,
Tia Saporito
Tennessee

From: Lydia Fortune <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 19:24:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

As a Christian and as an American citizen I would like to express that I do not agree with the Religious Liberty Commission's declaration that there is no separation of church and state. God does not force us to have faith in Him and operates on the principles of Love, Trust, and Freedom. God does not want people to serve him out of coercion but out of love. Furthermore, different denominations interpret the Bible differently and hold different values depending on their interpretation. Because of this each individual needs to have the freedom to interpret the Bible for themselves.

Thomas Jefferson explains it this way:

"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."

I believe that government has no authority to tell you what to believe, or how to worship, and that government lacks authority over religion.

I am also a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our co-founder Ellen White said:

"We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. Fervent, effectual prayer should be ascending to heaven that this calamity may be deferred until we can accomplish the work which has so long been neglected. Let there be most earnest prayer and then let us work in harmony with our prayers." — Testimonies for the Church 5:714 (1889).

"We cannot labor to please men who will use their influence to repress religious liberty...The people of God are not to vote to place such men in office, for when they do this they are partakers with them of the sins which they commit while in office." — Fundamentals of Christian Education, 475.

Sincerely,

Lydia Fortune

From: Christian Smith <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and State legislation
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 19:25:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Church and state must remain separate, when they are joined together we find ourselves moving back towards the Papal system where millions died. The State should never impact what people believe and choose to follow in their faith.

Pastor Christian Smith
Fort Wayne Seventh-Day Adventist Church
[redacted] | Mobile

Fort Wayne Church | Youtube

From: A-O Metro SDA Church <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 19:59:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am Highly OPPOSED to what is happening right now in our government with this commission on religious liberty. Ridiculous.

I have read the Pillar of Freedom response and I 100% Agree with it. There is, and has been, separation of church and state in our country, since the 1700's.

What you are doing, with this RL Commission.. you are resurrecting the Dark Ages! Religious persecution is right around the corner. I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and by God's grace, I will become an outlaw when I have to break your Sunday-keeping laws, because it will violate my liberty of conscience.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comment, & to consider my dilemma.
Briana Sherrer

From: Sabina Croft <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-separation of church and state-Sabina Croft
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:05:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear respected Religious Liberty Commission members,

As a Seventh-Day Adventist church member and U.S. citizen I am writing to ask that you reconsider the recommendations you made to President Donald Trump in your report on religious liberty that would weaken the separation of church and state; especially the repeal of the Johnson amendment and the use of government money to fund religious activities.

As churches take government money or step into the world of politics the corruption of both are imminent. Churches will compete for funding and become answerable to politicians instead of God. This is bad for individuals, churches, and the U.S.A.

Our forefathers fled religious intolerance and persecution. The recommendations the Religious Liberty Commission recommend will eventually lead the U.S.A. to experience those unfortunate circumstances again.

I am free to worship my creator as my conscience dictates and as the Holy Spirit leads me.
If churches accept government monies they will become subject to governmental involvement and ultimately governmental dictates. This would be contrary to our forefathers wishes.

The first table of the Ten Commandments addresses my relationship with God for which I am answerable to Him only.
The second table of the Ten Commandments has to do with my relationship with others for which I am answerable to both God and the civil authorities.

Please, I ask you sincerely, to protect my right to worship God without outside influence.

Sincerely,
Sabina Croft- New York State

From: Patricia Humphrey <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Religious Liberty and Preservation of Constitutional Principles
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:14:31 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Commission on Religious Liberty,

Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Commission's work. As an American citizen, I am deeply grateful for the freedoms protected by the Constitution, especially the God-given right to freedom of conscience and the free exercise of religion. These liberties have enabled people of diverse beliefs to live together peacefully while practicing their faith according to the convictions of their own conscience.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe that faith must always be voluntary. Genuine worship cannot be produced through government influence, financial support, or political power. Throughout history, religious liberty has flourished when both church and state have respected the proper boundaries of their respective roles.

My concern is not simply for the protection of my own faith, but for the preservation of liberty of conscience for every person. The same constitutional principles that protect my right to worship according to my convictions also protect the rights of those whose beliefs differ from mine—or who hold no religious beliefs at all. I believe our nation is strongest when government neither advances nor inhibits religion, but instead safeguards the freedom of every citizen to follow the dictates of conscience.

For these reasons, I respectfully express my concern regarding several recommendations contained in the Commission's report, including:

- The use of public funds to support religious nonprofit activities.
- The use of public funds to support religious education and religious clubs on public school campuses.
- The repeal of the Johnson Amendment, which limits the political activities of churches and other tax-exempt organizations.

I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the longstanding constitutional principles that have served our nation so well. I also ask that the Johnson Amendment remain in place and continue to be appropriately enforced.
Religious liberty is among America's most precious freedoms. It is a legacy that has benefited people of every faith and conviction, and one that I hope will be carefully preserved for future generations.

Thank you for considering my comments and for your service to our nation. May God grant you wisdom in your deliberations, and may He continue to bless the United States of America.

Respectfully,
Pat Humphrey

From: Martha Ball <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Maintain Division of Church and State
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:27:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a concerned citizen and as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian to respectfully urge the Commission to preserve a strong institutional separation between religion and government as it carries out its work.

As a Christian, my faith is central to my life. Because I deeply value religious freedom, I also believe that government should maintain a clear institutional distance from religion. I do not believe this weakens faith; rather, it protects the freedom of every individual to worship God according to the convictions of their own conscience without government influence, preference, or coercion.

The United States was founded on the principle that every person has the freedom to practice their faith—or to choose no faith at all—without government interference or favoritism. I believe one of our nation's greatest strengths is its commitment to protecting the religious liberty of all people equally.

Maintaining a clear institutional distance between government and religion does not diminish the importance of faith. Rather, it ensures that no individual or religious tradition is elevated above another through government action. This protects Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, atheists, agnostics, and members of every other belief system by guaranteeing equal treatment under the law.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I belong to a faith tradition that has long advocated for religious liberty and freedom of conscience for all people—not only for those who share our beliefs. Our history reminds us that religious minorities are especially vulnerable when government becomes closely aligned with any one faith or denomination. Protecting a government that neither establishes nor favors religion is one of the best safeguards for preserving the freedom to worship according to one's conscience.

Government should continue to safeguard every person's right to worship, pray, gather, and express sincerely held religious beliefs without discrimination. At the same time, government institutions should remain neutral in matters of religion so that all Americans can have confidence that their rights are protected regardless of their beliefs.

History has shown that when government aligns itself too closely with a particular religion, both religious liberty and public trust can suffer. Religious freedom is strongest when faith is embraced voluntarily rather than promoted or endorsed by the state.

As you consider recommendations regarding religious liberty, I respectfully ask that the Commission uphold the constitutional principles embodied in the First Amendment by protecting both the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause. These complementary protections help ensure that every American enjoys the freedom to believe, worship, or refrain from religious practice according to the dictates of their own conscience.

Thank you for your service and for considering the perspectives of citizens who value both religious freedom and governmental neutrality. I hope the Commission's work will continue to strengthen the rights and liberties of all Americans, regardless of their religious beliefs or affiliations.

Respectfully,

Martha Ball
Stearns, KY

From: Paul Moore <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Paul Moore
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:37:45 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: July_11,_2026_Religious_Liberty.pdf

July 11, 2026

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

To Members of our Religious Liberty Commission:

It has come to my attention what your Report on Religious Liberty is proposing.
As a Bible-believing Christian and citizen of the USA it concerns me what I read in the report. It is my prayer that it does not become enacted as it is currently written.
Our Constitution, I believe, is a beautiful, relevant, inspired, and wise document that has served our nation well for these two and a half centuries.
The funding of religious non-profit activities by government or public schools is not supported by the Constitution. Therefore The Johnson Amendment should remain intact, and be enforced.
The First Amendment, assures the free exercise of religion, is part of our US Constitution's greatness, and has afforded people such as myself the liberty to worship according to the dictates of my conscience, as I read and seek to follow God's Word.
As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I don't expect, and I don't want, the government to grant me or my church special favor based upon my religious profession or practice. Nor do I want the government to tell me when, how, or whom I should worship. I certainly wouldn't expect to be punished or otherwise persecuted for worshipping according to dictates of my conscience. The Seventh-day Adventist

Church has a long history of working to insure and uphold individual's rights in these matters, and I applaud them for that.
Our founding fathers (Please review the story of Roger Williams. The founder of Rhode Island.) saw the need for the First Amendment for good reason. That the Church and the State remain uniquely separate from one another's affairs, thus best serving American citizens.
I plead to each of you, to carefully reconsider the measures outlined in your Report, and to heed the foresight and wisdom of the framers of our Constitution, as well as heed those points outlined in the letter composed at Pillar of Freedom, with which I am in full agreement.
I am confident that I speak for a myriad of concerned citizens when I say that we must consider and ensure liberty of conscience for all.
I do thank you for your attention, for taking the time to consider these concerns, and working to keep America the land of the free..

Sincerely and prayerfully,
Mr. Paul Moore

From: Glenna Eady <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Glenna J. Eady
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:44:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission:

I am troubled to learn of the RLC's desire to remove the concept of the "separation of church and state" from the fabric of our society. You are right, the phrase "separation of church and state is not in the constitution" but it is in history. And that history is part of my heritage. It is why my Mennonite grandparents came here to escape the certain loss of freedom in Russia, including religious freedom. They were conscientious objectors and a war was looming. They had been promised freedoms that were in jeopardy. They uprooted home and family and came to live in a land where they could be truly free.

That separation wasn't built by secularists to keep religion down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. When the government supplies money, opportunities and support, a church loses its ability to be led by their convictions before God and His Word.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I read history with alarm and see how much persecution came to the people of God when the church relied on the power of the state. Have you read the history of the Dark Ages?

Keep the wall. It protects the church, it protects the government, it protects me, it protects you.

Sincerely,
Glenna J. Eady
Paradise CA

From: Mary Joe Oft <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep Separation of Church and State
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:48:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please note that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically been on the side of true religious liberty for all. In order to have this freedom to follow our conscientious personal religious convictions America must maintain the separation of church and state. Please stand with us and keep church and state separate.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Oft
Living Waters Intl
[redacted]
Phone [redacted]
email [redacted]

God is with you. God is for you. And God loves you!

From: mary jo oft <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Keep Church and State separate
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:53:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

Please note that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically been on the side of true religious liberty for all. In order to have this freedom to follow our conscientious personal religious convictions America must maintain the separation of church and state. Please stand with us and keep church and state separate.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Oft
Living Waters Intl
[redacted]
Phone [redacted]
email [redacted]

God is with you. God is for you. And God loves you!

Mary Jo Oft
Living Waters Intl
[redacted]
Phone [redacted]
email [redacted] Sent from my iPhone

From: Thomas Burket <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:53:58 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: 1000006496.jpg; 1000006497.jpg

Please read and consider.
Thank you & God bless!

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington,

DC 20500 United States of America

Date: April 15, 2026

From: Faithful Members of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church

To: the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Dear Sir or Madam,

We write as faithful Seventh-day Adventists Christians to respectfully, yet firmly, express our deep concern and clear opposition to the recent conclusion of the religious liberty commission associated with the administration of President Donald J. Trump, held on April 13 in Washington D.C., which concluded that there is no true or absolute separation between church and state.

We do not agree with this conclusion.

Our position is grounded in the enduring principles of Scripture, the Constitution of the United States, and the consistent testimony of history. Together, these affirm that liberty of conscience can only be preserved where there is a clear and firm distinction between the authority of the state and the authority of God. The Bible establishes this boundary plainly. Christ declared,

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). In this statement, two distinct realms are identified.

I. The government is entrusted with responsibilities such as maintaining public order, administering justice, collecting taxes, and governing civil relations among individuals.

II. In contrast, God alone holds authority over worship, conscience, and the loyalty of the soul.

Conscience belongs to God. Therefore, no human government has the right to force belief, compel worship, or regulate religious practice. This principle later became central to the concepts of freedom of religion, the separation of church and state, and the protection of individuals against religious coercion. Any attempt by the state to enter this domain is an overreach of authority. True faith cannot exist without freedom. The gospel calls, it does not compel.

Truth and duty to God are not determined by vote or the majority. Faith must be voluntary and no other man or state has jurisdiction over conscience. The moment the state supports, enforces, or favors religion, it steps into God's domain, corrupts the religion, and leads to a destructive backlash.

In Europe, centuries of alliance between church and state led to the suppression of conscience and widespread persecution . The French Revolution can be attributed to the loss of religious liberty. The abuse of religious authority united with civil power produced instability, violence, and the rejection of religion itself.

Many who came to America, including the Pilgrims, sought freedom from state-controlled religion. Their struggle laid the groundwork for a new principle that faith must be free. This protestant principle matured and found lasting expression in the founding principles of the United States. As articulated in the Declaration of Independence: "All are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which is liberty." This understanding shaped the constitutional

DOJ-RLC Comment-019826

Pontius Pilate, to secure a civil sentence (John 18:28–31). Though Pilate found no fault in Him, he yielded to religious pressure and authorized His crucifixion (John 19:12–16). Thus, Christ was condemned through the combined action of church and state. This tragic union demonstrates that when religious authority employs civil power to enforce its will, it results not in righteousness, but in the violation of justice and the suppression of truth. As Christ Himself declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36) Therefore: Civil power cannot advance Christ's kingdom. Any attempt to do so is a denial of Christ's own words.

We also respectfully clarify that while individuals of the Seventh-day Adventist faith may serve in governmental or advisory roles, they do not represent the convictions of all believers, nor does any group of individuals represent the entire body of the church. Any position supporting a union of church and state does not reflect our beliefs or the historic teachings of our faith.

For these reasons, we respectfully reiterate our conviction that the preservation of religious liberty depends upon maintaining a clear and principled separation between civil authority and religious expression. Any departure from this boundary risks undermining both constitutional freedoms and the sacred rights of conscience.

As the Scriptures declare: "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (Psalm 118:8). Guided by this principle, we affirm our unwavering commitment to liberty of conscience and our respectful but firm opposition to any union of church and state.

We offer this statement in a spirit of respect and sincerity, and we remain open to constructive dialogue. We would welcome the opportunity to further share the biblical, historical, and constitutional foundations for our convictions.

We respectfully urge your office to uphold the principles that protect liberty of conscience and preserve the rightful distinction between civil authority and the authority of God.

With respect and sincerity,

Immanuel Isaac Jamunapersad	Joanna de Bruyn	William Pitt
Tim Hayden	Mark La Rose	Dennis Page

DOJ-RLC Comment-019827

From: Helene S Thomas <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: Jay Thomas <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Clause
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 20:59:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Below is a sample letter prepared by Seventh-day Adventist attorney Jay Cameron that may be used as a guide when contacting the Religious Liberty Commission. You may personalize it if you wish. If you are concerned about preserving genuine religious liberty and protecting freedom of conscience for all people, please take a few moments to submit your comments before the July 13, 2026 deadline. Your voice can help maintain the constitutional safeguards that have long protected the religious freedom of all Americans.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Via EMAIL: [redacted]

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

The bulk of this letter is a copy of a form letter offered to those who don't want to take the trouble to write their own opinion. But before including that, you will find immediately below my own opinions briefly stated:

Although I am not a lawyer, I took government classes back in the days when schools still taught what the constitution and the amendments actually said. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that this first amendment clearly states the principle of separation of church and state, in spite of the fact that it does not say those words exactly.

Amendment I

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 see that the following quote by Committee Chair Dan Patrick is false: *"[T]he separation of church and state is not in the constitution" and that the phrase "has no constitutional basis."*

It is there, clearly, in essence. There should be absolutely no law made to weaken the first amendment protections, and my vote is definitely against this.

Thank you for considering the opinions of the many who reject the below efforts to weaken this clause.

Sincerely,

Helene Thomas



Note Below:

Copy of suggested letter stating conclusions that are pretty much aligned with my own:

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,

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] comments re draft report
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 21:14:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whomever it concerns,

It appears to me that those who are responsible for preparing the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission draft report have not considered the history of the Middle Ages when so-called Christianity (specifically the Roman Catholic Church) dominated much of the civilized world. For more than a thousand years this powerful religious entity controlled the leaders and rulers of governments, forcing them to mete out the Church's punishments upon anyone who dared to disagree with the Church. Millions of innocent people were killed by this evil power. It has only been in the past 200+years that the Church's control over political entities has been subdued. However, it is plainly visible that the Church's power in the world, not only in America, is increasing.

Apparently many Americans, particularly younger ones (products of our public school system) do not know history. They do not understand that America has been unique among the nations of the world because of the freedoms we have enjoyed – which have been the envy of hundreds of thousands of people around the world.

Many people do not realize that a good proportion of the original settlers to America took the brave step into the unknown New World to escape the religious persecutions of the Old World. They desired to practice their religions as they deemed appropriate, without the dictates of any power – religious or political – defining their practices or attempting to control their convictions.

Unlike many people today, the founding fathers of our nation were all too familiar with conditions under the rule of the Church. Therefore they designed our Constitution to prohibit any religion (not only Christianity) from controlling the government. And they designed the Constitution in such as way as to prohibit the government from interfering with the practices of any religion.

Don't misunderstand me. I am heartbroken as an 84-year-old red-blooded American to see the moral decay in our society today. And as a devout life-long Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I would love to see all Americans revere our Creator God as I do. But to coerce anyone in an attempt to change their mindset is not permissible under our Constitution. And the God I serve doesn't want forced obedience. Obedience must come from the heart, not from the law.

In America we have numerous people of differing religions who stand to be persecuted by Christians if you continue on the path you are on – building a bridge between government and religion. One of the most beautiful attributes of America has been the freedom to follow whatever religion, or to abstain from all religion, a person desires. I believe that allowing the Christian Right to obtain political power is to spell doom to our Constitutional right to religious freedom in our wonderful America.

To try to enforce Christian beliefs upon our children in public schools by sanctioning the posting of the Ten Commandments or allowing Christian teachers to expound upon their personal religious beliefs, is just one example of the Christian religion being promoted into the everyday lives of Americans. It would only be fair to other religions to allow them to also post their own religious quotes or beliefs in our classrooms, or allow non-Christian teachers to promote their beliefs, but if that happened Christians everywhere across the country would rise up in arms! And yet under the Constitution, that should be allowed if Christianity is allowed to do it. If I were a Buddhist, or a Satanist, or of any other non-Christian religion, I would not want Christianity shoved at my children in school. Religion needs to be kept entirely out of our public schools, nor should it run any government entity.

As far as the government giving financial support for any religious organizations, such as non-profits, schools, or churches – this should never take place! This would lead to discrimination against certain entities which have agendas of which the government does not approve – and many entities would no doubt "conform" to the government, possibly against their own convictions and practices, in order to obtain government financial support.

For example, if the Christian Right faction continues to gain more momentum and power, it is possible that they could prohibit non-Christian religious entities from obtaining any government financial support. This would be undesirable un-American discrimination.

And of course it logically follows, that any agency or entity which receives government handouts must of necessity expect the government's nose to be in their own private business – not good at all!

From time to time recently I have heard people of influence speak about bringing back the enforcement of Sunday Blue Laws. Such a thing would spell persecution for many Americans who are of non-Christian faiths, as well as for many Americans who are seventh-day Sabbath worshippers. Their religious freedom would be stripped away from them.

The so-called "wall" between religion and politics is for the protection and benefit of both sides. To tear down that wall is to allow the darkness of the Middle Ages to again become prevalent. What a tragedy that would be for America!

Please reconsider the implications of continuing on the path you have embarked upon, which appears to be heading in the wrong direction.

Please keep religion and government separate for the benefit of all!

Kathleen Lamson

Alabama

From: joe long <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 21:28:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Mr. President, Honorable Justices of the Supreme Court, and Honorable Officials of the Department of Justice,
Grace and peace be unto you through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
We write as members of the Lancaster Seventh-day Adventist Church with sincere respect for the offices you hold and with grateful appreciation for the constitutional protections that have long safeguarded the liberty of every American to worship according to the dictates of conscience.
The Scriptures establish a clear distinction between the authority of civil government and the authority of God. Jesus Christ declared:
“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:21, KJV)
Civil government has an important God-ordained role in preserving justice, protecting life, and maintaining civil order. Yet no earthly government has been given authority to direct worship or to compel obedience in matters that belong exclusively to God.
When commanded to violate God’s will, the apostles faithfully answered:
“We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29, KJV)
The freedom to worship according to one’s conscience is not merely a political privilege—it is a God-given responsibility. Scripture teaches:
“Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” (Romans 14:5)
Likewise,
“So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” (Romans 14:12)
Every individual will answer personally before God. Therefore, no civil authority should compel religious observance or prohibit sincere obedience to God’s commandments.
As Seventh-day Adventists, we respectfully affirm that nowhere in the Holy Scriptures does God transfer the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week. We know of no biblical passage declaring Sunday to be God’s holy day of worship. Instead, the Scriptures consistently teach:
“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy… the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.” (Exodus 20:8-11)
“The seventh day is the sabbath.” (Exodus 20:10)
“The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.” (Mark 2:28)
“The sabbath was made for man.” (Mark 2:27)
The apostles continued to worship on the Sabbath after Christ’s resurrection (Acts 13:42-44; Acts 17:2; Acts 18:4), and Scripture looks forward to Sabbath worship in God’s eternal kingdom:
“From one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord.” (Isaiah 66:22-23)
For these reasons, we respectfully maintain that the issue before our nation is not simply one of religious freedom, but of religious liberty—the God-given and constitutionally protected right of every individual to worship according to conscience without coercion, preference, or discrimination.

History repeatedly demonstrates the dangers that arise whenever civil authority becomes intertwined with religious authority. Whenever government prescribes or favors a particular form or day of worship, the conscience of the individual is placed under pressure, minorities become vulnerable, and liberty for all is diminished.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe Bible prophecy warns of future attempts to unite religious and civil authority in matters of worship (Revelation 13). While Christians may differ in interpreting prophecy, our church has consistently advocated for the protection of liberty of conscience for people of every faith and of no faith. Religious liberty protects Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, and all others equally.

Ellen G. White wrote:

“The union of the church with the state, be the degree ever so slight, while it may appear to bring the world nearer to the church, does in reality but bring the church nearer to the world.” (The Great Controversy, p. 297)

She also warned:

“The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God’s witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands.” (The Acts of the Apostles, p. 68)

We therefore respectfully appeal to all branches of our government to continue defending the constitutional principles embodied in the First Amendment, ensuring that no American is compelled by civil authority to observe a religious practice contrary to conscience or prevented from observing the commandments of God according to sincerely held religious conviction.

We pray for wisdom for our nation’s leaders, as Scripture instructs us:

“I exhort therefore, that… prayers… be made for kings, and for all that are in authority.” (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

May God grant each of you wisdom, humility, justice, and courage as you uphold the liberties entrusted to your care.

From: bonnie love <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE - BONNIE LOVE
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 21:28:31 -0400
Importance: Normal

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1. I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.
2. I object to funding religious non-profit activities.
3. I object to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.
4. I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts churches political activities.
5. I agree with Piller of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Love
Seventhday Adventist Christian

From: Jayne Nelson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – PRESIDENTIAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS – JAYNE NELSON
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 21:30:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

As a life long Seventh Day Adventist the study of Religious Liberty has been ingrained in me from childhood. I'm sorry to read many of the Commission's recommendations that seem to promote the opposite of Liberty of religion and conscience. I request the government to not do away with the Johnson amendment. I hear enough about politics during the week and greatly enjoy hearing only about God and his book The Holy Bible during religious services. I also do not want my church accepting any political money. I heard some of the members of the commission stating that the separation of church and state is not in the constitution, I heartily disagree. What about the bill or rights, the establishment clause in the first amendment? What about "no religious test" to run for or hold public office, to name a few.

My ancestors came over from Europe on the Mayflower and many of the ships that arrived thereafter. They came to America to escape religious persecution and tyranny. It didn't start off perfectly as one of my ancestors Mary Barrett Dyer was hung in Boston in 1660 for following Quaker Beliefs, But people like William Penn and Roger Williams realized the need for religious tolerance and promoted it in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island to much success. I am so grateful to have lived in this country my whole life, enjoying the freedoms and blessings afforded by the government and legal system as formed long ago.
One of my heroes for years is AAG Harmeet Dhillon, she is fighting for religious freedom while your commission appears to be attempting to limit it. I hope and pray that you will do the right thing in this cause.

Sincerely
Jayne McDonald Nelson
Redlands, CA

From: Debra Racz <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Yes, there is separation of Church and state
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 21:31:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Commissioners,

Please accept my personal comment for the record before the public comment period closes.

Urgent Appeal: Defend Religious Liberty Before July 13

July 7, 2026 by Andy Roman 7 Comments



The President's Religious Liberty Commission has opened a formal public comment period, allowing individuals the opportunity to submit written feedback and express their concerns regarding the Commission's work and recommendations. The deadline for submitting comments is July 13, 2026, making this a limited window to have your voices heard. Those who value the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state should prayerfully consider participating in this process.

Below is a sample letter prepared by Seventh-day Adventist attorney Jay Cameron that may be used as a guide when contacting the Religious Liberty Commission. You may personalize it if you wish. If you are concerned about preserving genuine religious liberty and protecting freedom of conscience for all people, please take a few moments to submit your comments before the July 13, 2026 deadline. Your voice can help maintain the constitutional safeguards that have long protected the religious freedom of all Americans.

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,

Debra and Marty Racz

[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/PJA01

Sincerely,

Debra Racz

Debra Racz reminds us to worship the LORD of the Sabbath.
"Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath"
Mark 2:27, 28 PS: The seventh-day sabbath is God's idea.

From: "Dr. Jose Prakash" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENTS
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 21:32:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

Subject: Public Comment — My Church Was Persecuted Under Religious Laws in America; Do Not Rebuild That Road

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a Seventh-day Adventist. For my church, religious persecution in America is not a hypothesis — it is family history.

Between 1885 and 1896, scores of Adventists were prosecuted under state Sunday laws. Men were fined, imprisoned, and sentenced to labor on chain gangs alongside criminals — for the crime of quietly plowing their fields or working in their shops on Sunday, after having rested on the Bible Sabbath. These laws were defended, then as now, as expressions of the nation's Christian morality.

In 1888, our representative A. T. Jones testified before the Senate against a national Sunday-rest bill. He warned even the religious majority that supported it: "No man can allow any legislation in behalf of the religion, or the religious observances, in which he himself believes, without forfeiting his own religious freedom." That principle — not hostility to faith — is why we have defended the separation of church and state for 140 years, through the American Sentinel of Jones's day and Liberty magazine in ours.

I commend the report's support for workplace religious accommodation, which protects Sabbath-keepers, and its concern for conscience rights. But I urge the Commission to reconsider the recommendations that would weaken the Establishment Clause, mandate religious displays in schools, and expand government-sponsored religious instruction. Laws favoring majority religious practice always fall hardest on religious minorities — we bear the scars that prove it.

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

Respectfully,

Dr. Jose Prakash

From: "Dr. Lela Lewis" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission Recommendations
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 21:42:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

Esteemed **Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the vital issue of religious liberty in the United States. I appreciate your willingness to consider the views of citizens from diverse backgrounds and faith traditions on a matter that lies at the very heart of our constitutional republic.

My Personal Testimony and Why I Founded Liberty & Health Alliance

My name is Dr. Lela Lewis, MD, MPH, FACOG. I am a board-certified physician, a Seventh-day Adventist Protestant Christian, and the Founder and CEO of Liberty & Health Alliance.

I write not only as a physician, but as someone whose life has been profoundly shaped by both the blessings of religious liberty and the devastating consequences that follow when civil government becomes entangled with religion.

My commitment to religious liberty spans generations. My ancestors fled religious persecution in Europe, crossing the Atlantic aboard the Mayflower in search of the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience. They risked everything in pursuit of a land where civil government would not dictate religious belief. Their courage and sacrifice helped lay the foundation for the American conviction that faith must always be voluntary and that conscience belongs to God alone.

That heritage became deeply personal in my own family.

I was born in Africa to Christian missionary parents who dedicated their lives to sharing the love of Jesus Christ largely politicized religious state. From my earliest years, my family witnessed firsthand the consequences of countries whose governments united with a national religion. Those who did not conform to the officially recognized faith faced discrimination, persecution, and, in some cases, death. My own family narrowly escaped with our lives. Those experiences impressed upon me that religious liberty is far more than an American constitutional principle—it is essential to preserving human dignity, freedom of conscience, and even life itself.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I belong to a Protestant denomination that has, since its founding, defended religious liberty for people of every faith—not merely for ourselves. We believe that faith must always be voluntary, that conscience belongs to God alone, and that neither church nor government should exercise authority over the other.

As a young student in Southern California, I continued to stand for biblical principles. I spoke and wrote in defense of the sanctity of human life, freedom of speech, and the right to express sincerely held religious convictions, even when those convictions were unpopular.

Years later, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I once again found myself defending those same principles. I opposed government interference in the affairs of the church and defended the right of every individual to follow the dictates of conscience in matters of faith. My convictions ultimately cost me my employment, but liberty of conscience is not a principle that can be compromised for personal convenience or financial security.

Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of working with my mentor and friend, Dr. Ben Carson, on numerous initiatives. I hold Dr. Carson in the highest esteem and deeply respect his integrity, lifelong service to our nation, and unwavering commitment to faith, family, and freedom. While thoughtful people may reach different conclusions on matters of public policy, my convictions regarding religious liberty arise not from politics but from Scripture, history, and my family's personal experience.

These experiences led me to found Liberty and Health Alliance.

I founded Liberty and Health Alliance because I believe every American should be free to share his or her faith without fear of government interference, governmental favoritism, or coercion. Our ministry exists to demonstrate Christ's love by caring for the whole person—body, mind, and spirit—while freely sharing the hope of the Gospel. We believe every individual must remain free to accept or reject matters of faith according to the dictates of conscience.

Our mission reflects the ministry of Jesus Christ, who healed the sick, cared for the suffering, and invited people to follow Him without force or compulsion. Genuine faith cannot be created by government, purchased with public funds, or compelled through civil authority. It must always remain a free response to God's invitation.

For this reason, I have dedicated my life to protecting both faith and liberty because I believe they are inseparable. A government that controls religion threatens faith, and a religion that seeks governmental power ultimately compromises its spiritual mission. History repeatedly demonstrates that whenever church and state become intertwined, both institutions suffer and liberty of conscience is placed in jeopardy.

I submit this testimony because I want my children, my grandchildren, and every future generation of Americans to enjoy the same God-given freedoms my ancestors sought, that my missionary parents defended, and that countless men and women throughout history have sacrificed to preserve.

The Biblical Foundations of Religious Liberty

While my family's history has profoundly shaped my understanding of religious liberty, my convictions rest first and foremost upon the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

The principle of religious liberty did not originate with America's Founders. It originated with Christ Himself.

When questioned about paying taxes to Rome, Jesus made a distinction that forever defined the proper relationship between civil government and the kingdom of God:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

In those few words, Christ acknowledged the legitimate role of civil government while affirming that worship, conscience, and ultimate allegiance belong exclusively to God. Caesar may rightly collect taxes, administer justice, and preserve civil order, but he has no authority over the human conscience. Likewise, what belongs to God—including our worship, our tithes and offerings, and our allegiance—must never be claimed by the state.

Jesus reaffirmed this principle before Pontius Pilate when He declared:

"My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)

Christ deliberately refused to establish His kingdom through political power or governmental authority. He never sought civil enforcement of His teachings. Instead, He invited people to follow Him freely. Love cannot be compelled, and genuine faith cannot be created by legislation.

The apostles faithfully continued this principle. When commanded by the civil authorities to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, they respectfully replied:

“We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29)

Their response recognized that civil government is ordained by God and possesses legitimate authority within its proper sphere. Yet that authority is not unlimited. When human law conflicts with God’s commands, the believer’s highest allegiance belongs to God.

Scripture consistently teaches respect for civil government while maintaining a clear distinction between civil authority and spiritual authority. Government exists to preserve justice, punish wrongdoing, and protect the rights of its citizens. It was never commissioned to govern the conscience or determine the content of religious belief.

This distinction runs throughout Scripture. God invites; He does not compel. Christ called disciples; He did not coerce subjects. The Gospel advances through love, truth, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit—not through the power of the state.

History repeatedly confirms the wisdom of Christ’s teaching. Whenever governments assume authority over religion, or whenever religious institutions seek governmental power, liberty of conscience is endangered. During the Middle Ages and the Inquisition, countless individuals suffered persecution when church and state became united. Even in colonial America, established churches sometimes used civil authority against Quakers, Baptists, and other religious minorities, demonstrating that sincere religious people are not immune from the temptation to use governmental power to advance their own beliefs.

These painful lessons remind us that the safest protection for every citizen is to preserve the distinction Christ Himself established. Government should vigorously protect every person’s free exercise of religion, but it should neither establish, finance, favor, nor control religion. Likewise, the church fulfills its God-given mission most faithfully when it relies upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit rather than the coercive power of the state.

This biblical principle has guided my life, my medical ministry, and my commitment to preserving religious liberty for every American, regardless of faith or creed.

The American Founders and the First Amendment

The American experiment in religious liberty did not arise in a vacuum. The Founders understood the painful lessons of history. They knew what had happened when governments established religion, compelled religious observance, or favored one denomination over another. Many descended from those who had fled persecution in Europe, while others carefully studied the tragic consequences of centuries during which civil governments and religious institutions exercised power together.

Determined not to repeat those mistakes, they established a constitutional system that protects both religion and civil government by preserving the independence of each.

The First Amendment declares:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…”

These two protections are inseparable. The Establishment Clause protects religious institutions from government control and prevents government from favoring one religion over another. The Free Exercise Clause protects

every person's right to worship—or not worship—according to the dictates of conscience. Together, they safeguard the religious liberty of every American, regardless of faith or creed.

This understanding did not exclude religion from public life. On the contrary, the Founders recognized that faith flourishes best when it is free—supported by conviction rather than compelled by law or sustained through governmental power.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the **Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)**, expressed this principle with remarkable clarity:

"To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical."

Jefferson understood that liberty of conscience includes not only the freedom to believe, but also the freedom from being compelled to financially support religious teachings contrary to one's own convictions. His warning remains highly relevant today. Whenever government funds religious organizations, taxpayers may eventually be required to support ministries or religious beliefs with which they fundamentally disagree.

In his famous January 1, 1802, letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, President Thomas Jefferson described the First Amendment as building:

"…a wall of separation between Church & State."

That "wall" was never intended to drive religion from the public square. Rather, it was designed to protect both institutions. It shields religion from governmental control while preventing government from exercising authority over matters of faith and conscience.

James Madison, often called the "Father of the Constitution," reached the same conclusion in his **Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments (1785):**

"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?"

Madison recognized a timeless truth: if government possesses the authority to favor one religion, it also possesses the authority to favor another. Once civil government enters the business of supporting religion, it inevitably acquires the power to determine which religions qualify for support and which do not.

Madison also reflected upon the lessons of history:

"During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution."

His conclusion echoed the lesson repeatedly demonstrated throughout history: whenever religion relies upon the power of the state, both religion and liberty suffer.

These warnings deserve careful consideration today.

Government involvement with religion often begins with sincere and well-intentioned motives. It may be presented as a way to encourage morality, strengthen communities, preserve religious heritage, or assist faith-based organizations in serving the public. Yet history consistently demonstrates that governmental support frequently becomes governmental oversight.

The authority to fund religion gradually becomes the authority to regulate religion.

Financial support often carries conditions. Conditions lead to oversight. Oversight creates influence. Influence can ultimately become control.

The issue, therefore, is not whether present leaders can be trusted. The greater question is whether future governments should possess such authority at all. Constitutional protections exist precisely because they guard against the abuse of power by future generations whose motives and policies cannot be predicted.

The wisdom of the First Amendment is that it protects both religion and government by preserving the proper sphere of each. Government best serves society by administering justice, protecting individual rights, and preserving civil order. Religious institutions best fulfill their mission by proclaiming truth, serving others, and inviting people to faith through love rather than coercion.

This understanding has made the United States a beacon of religious liberty for nearly two and a half centuries. It has protected Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, atheists, and countless others by ensuring that government neither establishes religion nor interferes with its free exercise.

These constitutional principles harmonize perfectly with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Long before the First Amendment was written, Christ declared, **"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."** America's Founders wisely incorporated that biblical distinction into our constitutional system, recognizing that civil government and religious faith each flourish best when neither exercises authority over the other.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the wisdom of our Founders by faithfully protecting both Religion Clauses of the First Amendment. Government should vigorously defend the free exercise of religion while refraining from establishing, financing, favoring, or controlling religious institutions. The surest safeguard of religious liberty remains the principle embraced by Christ, preserved by the Founders, and enshrined in the Constitution: **conscience belongs to God, and faith must always remain free.**

The Historic Seventh-day Adventist Commitment to Religious Liberty

My commitment to religious liberty is deeply personal, but it is not mine alone. It reflects the historic and longstanding position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a Protestant Christian denomination that, since its founding in the nineteenth century, has consistently defended religious liberty for people of every faith—and for those of no faith at all.

This commitment is rooted in Scripture. We believe that every human being is created in the image of God and has been given the God-given freedom to respond to Him voluntarily. Faith that is compelled by civil authority is not genuine faith. Love cannot be forced, worship cannot be legislated, and conscience belongs to God alone.

Because of these biblical convictions, Seventh-day Adventists have consistently opposed religious coercion from every direction. We have defended the religious freedom of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, atheists, and all others because the right of conscience belongs equally to every person—not because government grants it, but because it is a gift from God.

This principle is reflected in the official statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Religious Liberty:

"Religious liberty includes the human freedom to have or adopt the religion of one's choice, to change religious belief according to conscience, to manifest one's religion individually or in community with others, in worship, observance, practice, promulgation and teaching, subject only to respect for the equivalent rights of others."

The Church further affirms:

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that the right to religious freedom is fundamental, rooted in the dignity of every human being, and that governments have a responsibility to protect this freedom equally for all.”

These are not merely institutional statements. They express a conviction that has shaped the mission and public witness of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for more than 160 years.

One of the Church’s founders, Ellen G. White, repeatedly warned that even a slight union between church and state ultimately harms both institutions. In *The Great Controversy*, she wrote:

“The union of the church with the state, be the degree never so slight… does in reality but bring the church nearer to the world.”
(*The Great Controversy*, p. 297.)

She understood from both Scripture and history that whenever the church relies upon the power of the state, it gradually exchanges the transforming power of the Holy Spirit for the coercive power of civil authority. The result is not stronger religion, but weakened faith and diminished liberty.

Writing about the history of religious persecution, Ellen White observed that the union of church and state repeatedly led to oppression of those whose consciences differed from the majority. She pointed to both medieval Europe and colonial America as reminders that sincere religious people, when armed with civil power, have sometimes repeated the very injustices from which they themselves once sought refuge.

Her warning remains strikingly relevant today. The danger does not lie only in government controlling religion. It also lies in religion seeking governmental influence or dependence. Whenever either institution exceeds its God-given sphere, liberty of conscience is placed at risk.

This understanding has profoundly influenced my own life and ministry.

As the founder of Liberty & Health Alliance, I seek to follow Christ’s example by ministering to the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. We gladly share our faith, but we never seek to compel it. We invite; we do not coerce. We persuade through love, service, and the teaching of God’s Word, trusting the Holy Spirit—not civil authority—to change hearts.

This distinction is essential.

The mission of the church is to proclaim the Gospel, relieve suffering, and call men and women to follow Jesus Christ. The mission of civil government is to administer justice, preserve peace, and protect the rights and freedoms of its citizens. When each fulfills its proper role, both society and religious liberty flourish.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the constitutional principles that have protected our nation since its founding. Government should vigorously defend every person’s free exercise of religion while refraining from establishing, financing, favoring, or directing religion. Such neutrality does not weaken faith—it protects it.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe the surest safeguard of both religious liberty and authentic Christianity is the same principle taught by Jesus Christ, embraced by America’s Founders, and consistently affirmed by my Church throughout its history: **conscience belongs to God, and faith must always remain free.**

Lessons from the Inquisition and Colonial America: Why Government Funding of Religion Threatens Liberty

History provides sobering warnings about the dangers of allowing civil government and religious institutions to become intertwined. While such relationships often begin with sincere intentions—to strengthen morality, preserve religious heritage, or support faith-based organizations—they have too often ended by restricting liberty of conscience and weakening both religion and government.

Throughout the Middle Ages, as civil and ecclesiastical authority became increasingly united in much of Europe, dissent from officially approved religious beliefs was frequently treated as a civil offense. During the various periods commonly known as the Inquisition, countless men and women suffered imprisonment, torture, or death because their religious convictions differed from those sanctioned by both church and state.

The lesson is not merely that persecution occurred centuries ago. The enduring lesson is that whenever government acquires the authority to determine acceptable religious belief or practice, liberty of conscience is inevitably placed at risk.

Many of those who crossed the Atlantic to America sought refuge from precisely this kind of persecution. Yet history reminds us that even sincere and devout people are capable of repeating the mistakes from which they once fled.

In several American colonies, established churches received legal preference and governmental support. Quakers, Baptists, and other religious minorities were, at various times, fined, imprisoned, banished, or otherwise punished because they refused to conform to religious practices enforced by civil authority. These painful chapters remind us that the danger is not confined to one religion, one denomination, or one period of history. Whenever government favors one faith over another, liberty for all becomes fragile.

These historical lessons should guide our decisions today.
Government funding of religion may appear beneficial in the short term. It may enable worthy ministries to expand charitable work or provide valuable services to their communities. Yet history teaches that financial support is seldom without consequence.
Government funding inevitably raises important questions.

Will every religion receive equal treatment?

If not, who decides which religious organizations qualify for public support?

What standards will determine eligibility?

Will future governments attach conditions to funding?

Will religious organizations eventually be required to modify their beliefs or practices to remain eligible for continued assistance?

These are not hypothetical concerns. History demonstrates that the authority to fund religion often becomes the authority to regulate religion. Financial dependence can gradually lead to governmental oversight, restrictions, and influence over religious teaching and practice. What begins as assistance may ultimately become supervision, and supervision may become control.

Thomas Jefferson warned of this danger in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom when he wrote:
"To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical."

James Madison likewise warned that the same governmental authority capable of establishing one religion could just as easily establish another or favor one denomination over another. Their concerns remain as relevant today as they were when our Republic was founded.

Jesus Christ Himself established a different model.

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 an essential and God-ordained role. It administers justice, protects individual rights, preserves public order, and promotes the common good. But worship, conscience, and allegiance belong to God alone.

Jesus also declared:
"My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)

Christ refused to establish His kingdom through political power or governmental authority. He invited willing disciples rather than compelled subjects. His example teaches that genuine faith cannot be produced through government action or sustained by governmental favor.

The institutional separation of church and state does not diminish religion. Rather, it protects religion from governmental control while protecting government from becoming an arbiter of theological truth. It preserves the freedom of every citizen to worship according to conscience while allowing religious communities to carry out their spiritual mission without political dependence.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the historic American understanding of religious liberty. Government should vigorously protect the free exercise of religion for every citizen while refraining from establishing, financing, favoring, or directing religion.

The surest safeguard of liberty remains a government that protects the conscience of every citizen equally while leaving matters of faith where they have always belonged—in the hearts of individuals and under the authority of God.

Final Appeal to the Religious Liberty Commission

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission, thank you for your willingness to consider these comments and for your service to our nation during such an important time.

My appeal is not rooted in political ideology. It is rooted in Scripture, confirmed by history, and reinforced by my family's personal experience.

My ancestors crossed the Atlantic seeking the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience. My missionary parents and I witnessed firsthand the tragic consequences that follow when a nation unites civil government with an official religion. Those experiences taught me that religious liberty is not an abstract constitutional principle—it is a God-given right that protects human dignity, preserves freedom of conscience, and, at times, safeguards life itself.

As a physician, I have dedicated my life to caring for the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. As the founder of Liberty & Health Alliance, I have sought to follow Christ's example by serving others while respecting every person's freedom to accept or reject matters of faith according to the dictates of conscience. The Gospel is to be proclaimed through love, compassion, truth, and service—not through the authority of civil government.

America has become a beacon of religious liberty because our Founders wisely recognized the distinction between the responsibilities of church and state. Their understanding reflected the principle taught centuries earlier by Jesus Christ:

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

The state best fulfills its mission by administering justice and protecting the rights of its citizens. The church best fulfills its mission by proclaiming the Gospel and serving humanity through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Both flourish when each remains within its proper sphere.

History consistently demonstrates that whenever government acquires the authority to establish, finance, favor, or regulate religion, liberty of conscience is eventually threatened. The issue is not whether present leaders act with good intentions. Rather, it is whether future generations should possess powers that history has repeatedly shown can be misused.

I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to preserve both Religion Clauses of the First Amendment: that government shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion and shall not prohibit the free exercise thereof. These protections are inseparable. Together they have safeguarded the freedoms of Americans of every faith—and of those who profess no faith—for nearly two and a half centuries.

Please continue to protect every citizen's God-given right to worship according to the dictates of conscience—or not to worship at all—without governmental favoritism, coercion, or interference. Protect equally the rights of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, atheists, and every other American. Religious liberty belongs to all because conscience belongs to God.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe Christ calls His followers to persuade through love, truth, service, and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit—not through the power of civil government. Genuine faith must always remain voluntary.

It is my prayer that future generations of Americans will enjoy the same freedoms that inspired my ancestors to seek refuge on these shores, that allowed my missionary parents to proclaim the Gospel, and that have enabled me to dedicate my own life to serving others through Liberty and Health Alliance.

May God grant this Commission wisdom to preserve that priceless heritage, so that the United States will continue to be a nation where every individual remains free to think, to believe, to speak, to worship, and to live according to the dictates of conscience.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and for your commitment to protecting one of our nation's greatest blessings—religious liberty.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Lela Lewis, MD, MPH, FACOG-Founder & CEO/President
Liberty and Health Alliance
Seventh-Day Adventist Church Member

Sent from my iPhone

From: Maria Trejo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment- Freedom liberty of religion Maria Trejo
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 22:02:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hi Good evening I'm from San Diego California and I'm a Seventh Day Adventist. The constitution has passed that our freedom of religious is constituted. God allows to worship Him by will of freedom and we are to decide our ways to maintain our faith.
We should have separation between the state and the church. May God bless the leaders of our country and continue to grant them wisdom🙏

From: Joy Buchholz <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: Public Comment-Separation of Church and State-Joy Buchholz
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 22:45:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission: My name is Joy Buchholz, I am a loyal and devoted citizen of these United States of America, and I am a loyal and devoted Seventh-Day Adventist Christian. As such, I am dismayed that you are seeking to weaken the separation of church and state by replacing the "wall" with a "bridge". Separation is a protection; walls, by their nature, maintain boundaries and appropriate behaviors, while bridges allow for passing- the passing of inappropriate and wrongful behaviors. Government funding to churches for their activities and religious schools could- and Would- lead to competition among churches for those funds and grants, and to seeking for favors and special allowances. Basically, it would sooner or later lead to corruption- in the churches and in the government. As Jesus said to certain religious leaders in Mark 12:17 "Render to Caeser the things that are Caeser's, and to God the things that are God's". In this statement He clearly indicated that there was a difference, a "separation" between that which was Caeser's/the government's, and that which was God's/the church's.

I respectfully request that you maintain the separation of church and state, and that you do not repeal the Johnson Ammendment. Just as the church does not belong in politics, so politics do not belong in the church. Each individual, under God, has the right to liberty of conscience in spiritual and in political matters, in their homes and in their churches; not to feel pressured or coerced on political issues from the pulpit. I am asking you to please continue to protect that right.

Thank you.

Joy Buchholz
Laceys Spring, AL

From: Eileen Squires Greene <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:03:42 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Pillar_of_Freedom_Response_to_Religious_Liberty_Draft_7-06-2026.pdf

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July 11, 2026

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

My name is Eileen and I am a Seventh-day Adventist. I am writing 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.

The Rev. Paul Brandeis, president and CEO of Interfaith Alliance, made a statement: "The report and the commission behind it fail to represent and uplift the importance of religious diversity and tolerance for all faiths in our country — not just a special, chosen few." i am in agreement of that statement.

I have also read the Pillar of Freedom's comments to your draft. I agree with their comments.
Please implement them and keep church and state separate.

Sincerely,

Eileen Greene

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

[redacted]

DOJ-RLC Comment-019859

these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019860

> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019861

sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019862

of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

DOJ-RLC Comment-019869

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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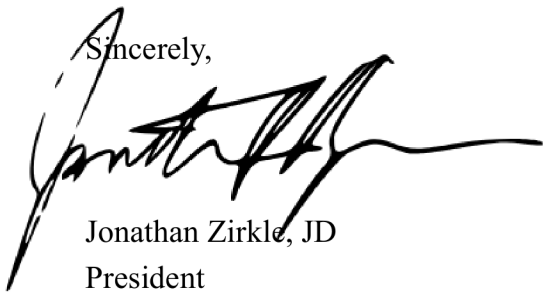
DOJ-RLC Comment-019870

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-019871

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Donald Cornforth
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:05:44 -0400
Importance: Normal

COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Donald Cornforth

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian. I am 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 and strongly appose it.**

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.

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

Sincerely,

Donald Cornforth

From: Arlene Hill <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:13:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 11, 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:

As a fourth generation Seventh-day Adventist, the concept of religious liberty that embodies the concept of the separation of church and state is very dear to me and my family. My German ancestors left Germany with other Mennonite families to escape military conscription in the mid-1700's. Catherine the Great promised freedom to worship according to the dictates of conscience in return for farming in the region she had recently taken from the Turks. Three of my grandfathers, Erdman Nickel (1743-1815), Johann Nickel (1796-1856), and David Nickel (1821-1900) farmed in the West Prussia, Ukraine area. Later, a new ruler insisted that they must fight in his army. David emigrated to the new world along with other faithful Mennonites, first coming to Manitoba in Canada.

Around 1894, my great grandfather, David Nickel, and his family joined the Seventh-day Adventist church. Their decision led to difficulties with local laws when authorities were informed that he worked on Sundays. They later emigrated to the United States where their "Blue Laws" were not as strictly enforced in North Dakota. After their parents died early, the older children worked the farm in Canada so the younger ones could attend further education. Many of my relatives went to SDA colleges and are active in their communities. My family continues to enjoy the freedoms in the USA and are grateful for them.

As you know, America was founded on the principle of allowing freedom of conscience and for years that policy has been blessed by God. Your Commission has received a statement from a religious liberty attorney, Jonathan Zirkle. He founded an organization named "Pillar of Freedom." https://pillaroffreedom.org/

I have read his statement (https://drive.google.com/file/d/13wd1AsF3m6STwD-v0ywpXFYnI-VRv8TF/view) and by this email, I am expressing my support of the ideas he explains. I ask the Commission not to support using state police power for enforcing religious rules and instead uphold our tradition of freedom of conscience and separation of church and state.

Sincerely,

E Arlene Hill

Reno, Nevada

From: MTPhelps <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:19:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

So what is the purpose of this? To protect all religions in USA? Whether Jew, Catholic, Protestant, Sabbatarians of many faiths, Hindu, Muslim, atheist, agnostic, etc?

Or is this another tear down and government control of religion? If so, then I am totally against it! This country was founded on a country without a king, and a nation without a pope, and now looks like we are heading back that way. I hope that Ben Carson, who is a Seventh Day Adventist, will show the good and bad about this. Many are against what you are doing, some are for it, but in the long run, we don't want a nation that speaks like a dragon. We want liberty to worship God the way our conscience feels us to do, without any government interference. Now government is having 10 commandments put in all schools in some states, and Bible stories to be giving in Texas starting 2030-31 school year, (probably others to follow). Is this is the way this nation should go, or at least that is about as far as it should go. I know long time ago, things were different, but then again, long time ago we had slavery also. Is that where we are headed for in this? Slavery to government controlled religion? Check out L.A. Marzulli, and Timothy Alberino's book, "Birthright" and add two plus two together with these UAP disclosure files. Time is short, let people decide to be saved themselves, we don't need government control in doing so.

From: David Axt <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – David Axt
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:20:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen and a Seventh Day Adventist 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 the government begins to fund religious activities it will only be a short time till they are telling the religious activities being funded what they can and cannot do.

When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. It is no secret that there is corruption in politics whether Republican or Democrat. Churches will end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God. When we as Christians begin to answer to men and not God the time is near, even at the door of Jesus' return where every knee will bow and confess that He is Lord.

Separation isn't a secular idea; our founding fathers and people of faith built separation of church and state to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here in the USA.

I compel and implore you as a Christian, a disciple of Jesus and a son of the true King, to please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,
David Axt
Goldendale, WA

From: vincent heale <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comments on Religious Liberty Commission draft report.
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:29:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

An Open Letter To the Religious Liberty Commission Against the Union of Church and State.

To those considering breaking down the wall of separation between church and state,

History has already answered this question. Every time the church has reached for the power of the state to accomplish God's work, the result has not been revival, it has been coercion. It has not produced genuine faith, it has produced fear. It has not reflected Christ, it has reflected Caesar.

The issue is not whether God has a moral law. He does. The issue is whether civil government has been given authority to enforce the first four commandments, which govern our relationship with God. Scripture says no.

There are two spheres of law. Civil government exists to protect people from one another, to punish murder, theft, fraud, violence, and injustice. But worship belongs to God alone. No legislature can produce repentance. No parliament can create faith. No government can compel love for God. True conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, not the work of politicians.

Jesus never forced anyone to worship Him. He invited. He persuaded. He preached. He healed. He loved. When people rejected Him, He did not ask Rome to enforce obedience. Instead He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Christ's kingdom advances through the gospel, not through legislation.

This is why the union of church and state is so dangerous. Whenever governments attempt to enforce what they "believe God requires", they must first decide whose interpretation of Scripture becomes law. Catholics? Baptists? Lutherans? Pentecostals? Seventh-day Adventists? Anglicans? With thousands of Christian denominations, and many other faiths besides, which interpretation should the state enforce? The moment government chooses one religious interpretation, liberty of conscience begins to disappear.

History bears this out.
The medieval union of church and state produced religious persecution, censorship, imprisonment, and the deaths of countless sincere believers. Protestants themselves fled Europe to escape governments that enforced religion. The American experiment in religious liberty became a beacon to the world because it rejected that model and protected freedom of conscience.

Even laws that appear "benign" can produce injustice. Sunday blue laws, for example, place a heavier burden on those who already worship on another day, such as Jews and Seventh-Day Adventist Christians. They lose

two business days while Sunday worshippers lose only one. Equal justice should never favour one faith over another.

Some argue that governments should simply enforce "Christian values." But which Christian values? Even sincere Christians disagree on baptism, communion, church government, prophecy, salvation, and worship. Should the state become the final interpreter of theology? History shows that whenever governments assume that role, religious minorities suffer.

God's own method is different. The Sabbath was blessed and sanctified at Creation (Genesis 2:2–3), long before there was a Jewish nation. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27), showing it was given for humanity. He told His disciples to pray that Jerusalem's destruction would not happen on the Sabbath (Matthew 24:20), indicating He had not set it aside, and had no plans to. Isaiah even pictures Sabbath worship in the new earth (Isaiah 66:22–23).

Nowhere in Scripture does God authorize replacing God's commandments with human religious traditions.

Jesus warned plainly:

> "In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:9)

That warning applies whenever human authority is elevated above God's Word.

The gospel itself teaches a better way. Paul wrote that we are saved by grace through faith, "not of works" (Ephesians 2:8–9). Genuine obedience follows as the fruit of a transformed heart (Ephesians 2:10). God works within us "both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). We work out what God works in. Obedience cannot be legislated because love cannot be legislated.

The church's responsibility is not to seek political power but to preach Christ. As hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit, lives are changed. Laws may restrain outward behaviour, but only the gospel transforms character.

This was Christ's example. He never compelled belief. He appealed to conscience. He spoke truth in love. He allowed people the freedom even to reject Him.

A wise person once wrote,

> "It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, who seek to compel the conscience."

Likewise:

> "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36)

Jesus refused to establish His kingdom through political force. The people wanted Him to become an earthly ruler and govern through civil power, but He rejected that path entirely. His kingdom is built one heart at a time.

History confirms, whenever church and state unite, liberty suffers. The answer to society's moral decline is not compulsory religion. It is the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ. The church should not ask the state to accomplish what only the Holy Spirit can do. Our mission is to proclaim Christ crucified, risen, and coming again, to call people to worship their Creator, to live by His Word, and to follow Him freely.

Let governments uphold justice. Let churches proclaim truth. Let every person enjoy the God-given freedom to worship according to conscience.

The gospel has never needed the power of the state and it still doesn't.

Sincerely,

Vincent Robert Heale M.D., Ph.D.,FRCPC

Sent from my iPhone

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Donald Cornforth
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:32:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

This is a duplicate letter. The first letter failed to state my City and State.

> COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Donald Cornforth
>
> Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
>
> I am a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian. I am 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 and strongly appose it.**
>
> 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.
>
> **Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.**
>
> **Sincerely,**
>
> Donald Cornforth, Bakersfield, California

From: IsadoraH Nordby <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comments on the Establishment Clause and the Johnson Amendment
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:50:28 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist and I want to send you my comments in regards to the commission's recommendations regarding: 1. Reframing the establishment clause away from the principle of separation, and 2. repealing the Johnson amendment.

Religious liberty is strongest when the government is strictly neutral. I urge the commission to revise its recommendations and to affirm strong free exercise of religion and to preserve the establishment clause's separation principle and the Johnson Amendment's guardrails.

Thank you for serving and being willing to accept feedback on this important issue.

Sincerely,
Isadora Nordby

From: Sophi Fletcher <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT: RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION REPORT
Date: Sat, 11 Jul 2026 23:55:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I write to 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.

As a 10th great-granddaughter of Roger Williams, and a fourth generation Seventh-day Adventist, religious liberty is of great importance to me.

While I recognize and appreciate the testimony of so many in your report who have suffered because of their beliefs, I firmly believe that bringing church and state closer together is not the path to reducing such events. In fact, quite the opposite is true. If you consider how different each person and each situation is, based on the sample in your report, I hope you can see that a legal umbrella is simply not practical, reasonable, or humane.

History has demonstrated time and again that when our personal beliefs are legislated by a particular power, people suffer terrible things, for example, The Crusades, The Inquisition, The Dark Ages, the Waldenses, the Hugenots, etc...

Historically, members of my Seventh-day Adventist faith were pressed into chain gangs in the 1800s for choosing to honor God's seventh day Sabbath, which I might note has never been changed by God.

Changing the Sabbath to Sunday, the first day of the week, was done by man-- the Emperor Constantine, in fact, ca. 321 AD. The entire world has come to accept and practice this tradition that is not Biblically based. A quick Google search will reveal that the Papacy does not deny this. Putting one's self in the place of God is blasphemy, plain and simple.

Soon this truth will become quite evident to all, and difficult choices will have to be made in regards to who one worships, and on which day.

I hope Dr. Carson will share copies of an invaluable book, The Great Controversy by Ellen G. White, with members of this Commission. (It is available online for free in pdf form as well.)

This book will serve to enlighten you further as you deliberate a very significant issue-- how significant, you may not yet realize.

Please remember the words of Thomas Jefferson in his letter to the Baptist Convention regarding the importance of keeping church and state separate. Although it is not contained in the Constitution, his intent and belief in this principle is clear.

I hope this will be brought to the attention of the current President, as he indicated his lack of understanding on this subject in his now-famous remarks. Thank you for your time and prayerful consideration of this matter.

Most respectfully yours,

Sophi Fletcher
Oregon

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: Rodney Bowes <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Rodney Bowes
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 00:00:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a concerned citizen and as a Seventh-day Adventist to urge you to reconsider recommendations in your report that could weaken the separation of church and state—particularly proposals that would direct government funds toward religious activities or repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Religious liberty has been a foundational concern of the Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout its history. Adventists believe that faith must be freely chosen and that government should neither compel religious observance nor interfere with the exercise of conscience. The Church has described religious liberty as a fundamental human right and has consistently supported the separation of church and state as an important safeguard for believers and nonbelievers alike.

This commitment is rooted in both Scripture and history. Jesus distinguished between the responsibilities owed to government and those owed to God when He said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21, KJV). The official Seventh-day Adventist statement on church-state relations points to the life and ministry of Christ as the model: although Christ possessed divine authority, He did not use governmental power to compel worship or religious conformity.

During the late nineteenth century, Adventists were among the most active opponents of national and state Sunday laws. Because Adventists worship on Saturday, they understood that government-imposed Sunday observance could penalize religious minorities and use civil authority to enforce the religious practices of the majority. Adventists opposed these laws not merely to protect themselves, but because they believed the state should not dictate anyone’s day or manner of worship. The Church established the International Religious Liberty Association in 1893 to advocate for freedom of conscience for people of every faith and for those who profess no faith.

The importance of these protections was demonstrated in the landmark Supreme Court case *Sherbert v. Verner* in 1963. Adell Sherbert, a Seventh-day Adventist, lost her job after refusing to work on Saturday, her Sabbath, and was then denied unemployment benefits. The Supreme Court ruled that the government could not force her to choose between following her religious convictions and receiving a generally available public benefit. That decision became one of the most important religious-exercise cases in American history.

More recently, the Supreme Court’s 2023 decision in *Groff v. DeJoy* strengthened protections for employees seeking reasonable religious accommodations. The case involved a postal employee who requested accommodation from Sunday work. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists filed an amicus brief because the legal standard in that case directly affected Adventists and many other Sabbath-keepers. The Court ruled that an employer must demonstrate a substantial increased cost before denying a religious accommodation under Title VII.

These cases demonstrate why religious freedom requires both strong Free Exercise protections and meaningful limits on government involvement with religion. People must be protected when they practice their faith, but religious institutions must also remain independent of governmental control, sponsorship, and political pressure.

Government funding of religious activity may initially appear helpful, but such funding almost always comes with conditions, oversight, and political expectations. The 2022 Supreme Court decision in *Carson v. Makin*, concerning public tuition payments to religious schools, illustrates the growing constitutional debate over when

generally available government benefits must include religious organizations. Whatever one's view of that decision, it demonstrates how quickly financial relationships between government and religious institutions produce difficult questions about government regulation, religious independence, and accountability for public funds.

When churches accept direct government support, they may eventually find themselves competing with other religious organizations for funding, adjusting their programs to satisfy governmental requirements, or becoming dependent on elected officials and political administrations. Churches should remain accountable to God, their members, and their religious mission—not to the political leaders who control public funding.

The same concern applies to repealing the Johnson Amendment. Churches and other organizations recognized under section 501(c)(3) may address moral issues, advocate for religious liberty, speak about legislation, and encourage responsible citizenship. The current restriction specifically prohibits tax-exempt organizations from participating in political campaigns for or against candidates for public office.

This distinction is important. Individual church members and religious leaders retain their rights as citizens to vote, participate in public life, and express personal political views. However, turning churches themselves into instruments of partisan campaigns would invite political division into the sanctuary. Candidates and political parties could begin seeking endorsements, influencing church leadership, and using congregations as political organizations. The Church's spiritual mission could become secondary to electoral victories.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically distinguished between the civic responsibilities of individual Christians and the institutional role of the Church. Its task is to proclaim biblical principles and address moral concerns, not to become an agency of a political party or a participant in partisan power struggles.

Separation of church and state is not an attack on Christianity, nor is it simply a secular idea. It was championed by people of faith who understood that religion is strongest when it is supported by conviction rather than coercion, government funding, or political privilege. A government that has the power to favor religion also has the power to regulate, manipulate, or suppress it.

Please preserve the independence of America's religious institutions, maintain appropriate safeguards against partisan political activity by tax-exempt churches, and resist efforts to use government money to support inherently religious activities.

Keeping church and state separate does not weaken religious faith. It protects the freedom, credibility, and integrity of both.

Respectfully,

Rodney W. Bowes

From: Lonna Petsch <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Lonna Petsch
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 00:32:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm a Seventh-day Adventist and agree with Pillar Of Freedom's comments.
We believe in Religious Liberty for you, and for everyone!

Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,
Lonna Petsch
Woodside, California

--
"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor. 4:6.

"Being justified freely (without any cost) by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,....to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Romans 3:24, 26.

Wonderful websites! www.bibleinfo.com, www.bibleuniverse.com, www.sabbathtruth.com, www.daretobelieve.com, www.truthaboutdeath.com
Listen: Livestream at adventist.hillcrest.org; Radio 91.7FM

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission Report- [Meredith Sherwin]
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 01:25:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,
Thank you for this opportunity to speak out on your recommendation to remove the wall of Separation of Church and State in our great nation. The separation of church and state, supported in the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the US Constitution protects the religious liberty of ALL in our land. This was greatly desired by those who began our country, after leaving the oppression of their homeland, with its mandated church state religion.

The using of force of government to promote Christianity never advances the true kingdom of God. Ben Carson, the Vice Chair of this Religious Liberty Commission, has known all throughout his life, as a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church, that legislating worship, always leads to persecution. We worship Jesus and live to honor Him, but Jesus, Himself, never demanded worship. Jesus invited people to follow Him, if they choose not to, He did not ever force them. Forcing all citizens to be in church on Sundays will never "make" people good and honorable citizens. True worship can only come from the heart.

The separation of church and state is an idea that originated with persecuted Christians, like Roger Williams, who wrote that civil magistrates only have jurisdiction over civil matters and are not "judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual, or Christian, state and worship... Christ Jesus never directed His disciples to the civil magistrate for help in His cause." - Roger Williams

Please consider my heartfelt request to allow the wall of separation of church and state to STAY INTACT, for the continued protection of religious liberty for ALL. Our forefathers fought for this religious freedom protection that is completely unique in the nations of the world. Nowhere on earth can one be completely free to worship their Creator, or other "god", or even no god at all, but in this most blessed and truly free United States of America.

Thank you for your consideration,
Meredith Sherwin

From: Sharon Tanghal <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT : Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 02:10:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a long time California resident, I would like to express my concerns regarding the draft report released by the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty which President Trump accepted in the Oval Office.

I have objections and concerns regarding the funding religious non-profit activities.
I also have objections to funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses. I also have concerns with repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts the church's political activities and strongly urge our government that the Johnson Amendment be FULLY ENFORCED. I also have objections to special treatment given Jewish people and the state of Israel. There needs to be complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.

I speak as a female Seventh Day Adventist, Sabbath keeping Christian who believe in the teachings of Bible and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. My parents were immigrants from the Philippines and believe in the American dream. One of the things we appreciate in America is the Freedom we can appreciate and that means the freedom of exercising the religion of our choice and not favoring one religious belief over another.

Thank you for your time in considering these concerns.

Sharon Tanghal
California

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: "Peter K. Chung" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Humble Appeal to the Religious Liberty Committee Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 02:32:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Esteemed Committee,

I hope this letter finds you well and blessed.

I am a lifelong, law-abiding American citizen who is deeply grateful for the freedoms guaranteed by this great nation. I am also a lifelong member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the same denomination as one of your esteemed committee members, Dr. Benjamin Carson.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have long upheld the principle of the separation of church and state. This conviction is rooted in our profound respect for Roger Williams, whose advocacy for religious liberty helped shape the foundation of freedom of conscience in colonial North America. Like Williams, we believe that religious liberty belongs to every person, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof.

Our church firmly believes that the Ten Commandments remain relevant to everyday life. We also uphold the biblical understanding of marriage, encourage marital faithfulness, defend the dignity and value of unborn life, discourage the use of substances such as alcohol and narcotics that impair moral judgment, and believe that our bodies are temples of God and should therefore be cared for with wisdom and respect.

At the same time, we believe that God grants every individual the freedom to accept or reject Him. Genuine faith cannot be compelled. We believe the gospel is sufficient to draw people to Christ without the involvement or coercion of the government. Nor do we believe that churches should influence the government to pressure individuals to adhere to a Judea-Christian faith tradition. We believe the Holy Spirit has the power to change individuals' hearts, and that this Divine Power is enough to lead more of our citizens to follow Jesus. For this reason, I respectfully pray that the committee will continue to recognize and preserve the vital principle of the separation of church and state.

Many of the early colonists, particularly those who came from England, sought refuge in North America to escape religious persecution under systems where church and state were intertwined. Their experiences helped shape the American commitment to religious liberty.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we embrace the vision championed by both Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson: an America that serves as a safe refuge where every individual is free to worship, speak, and live according to the dictates of conscience without fear of government interference.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter and for your service to our nation. I pray that God will grant you wisdom as you carry out your important responsibilities.

May God continue to bless you, and may God bless America.

Sincerely,

Peter Chung
Concerned Lifelong American Citizen

From: Heather Shurtliff <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Heather Shurtliff
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 03:52:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for wanting to protect Christian's rights.

2Co 3:17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

As I am also a follower of Jesus Christ and want to share my best friend and soon coming Savior with others (John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. =) to have the same comfort and blessed hope (Titus 2:13) he gives me daily.

I have concerns in wanting to protect Christian rights that it could go too far and not protect everyone's rights.

I am so grateful. Jesus is our best example in giving his life to give us freedom of choice, to choose him and his salvation,or not. Revelation 3:20. He is a true gentleman, Savior that knocks on our hearts door, leaving the choice up to us.

Thanks to some of my dedicated family passing on to our younger generations appreciation of true religious liberty (because of my past family going through religious persecution).

I have been blessed to have my two eldest aunts on either side, preserving some of our family history and passing it down to me even as a college, graduation gift.

I learned part of my Anabaptist heritage- that some close friends adopted one of my ancestors because his parents were imprisoned, for wanting to follow Jesus example in the Bible Matthew 3:17 to be baptized like he was. He was truly blessed that they risked their lives to bring him to America to have religious liberty and learn carpentry.

My other aunt let me know that I have Huegenot ancestors- (similar to the Waldensee Bible Christians)

https://youtu.be/C7XuYUR9vuI?is=29MqO_mWRJDAyoju (It became one of my very favorite opportunities to visit here with many students.

In the Italian alps this historical Christian school was nurtured by a dedicated group of people. The Waldensee families kept the beloved Bible alive for many generations.Psalms 119:105 Thy Word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path. Huguenots & Waldensees were peace, loving Christians, many of whom gave their lives for others to know Jesus.

My loved ones on both sides of my family risked their physical lives to come to America so that their children could freely read their Bibles, and live for Christ, and share him with others.

Roger Williams founded Rhode Island in 1636, he helped lay a foundation for other states to follow, as it was based on both civil and religious liberty. I am truly grateful the United States of America, would be a country where, the state had no king and the church had no pope.

Our faithful, first president George Washington:

“Every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience.”

I admire Jefferson even on his tombstone wanting to encourage future generations to protect religious liberty.

His tombstone words:

HERE WAS BURIED

THOMAS JEFFERSON

AUTHOR OF THE DECLARATION of

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

OF THE STATUTE OF VIRGINIA

FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDON AND FATHER OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA.

1829 U.S. Senate Committee Report “Among all the religious persecutions with which almost every page of modern history is stained, no victim ever suffered but for the violation of what government denominated the law of God.To prevent a similar train of evils in this country, the Constitution has wisely withheld from our government the power of defining the divine law. It is a right reserved to each citizen.”

Rom 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God… 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

Though some of our faithful, founding fathers Adams and Jefferson had a time of disagreement.Even after they had fought in the revolution together and put their lives on the line. Some years went by and they would not talk to each other.

Yet 14 years before they died- they would renew their friendship by writing nearly 140 meaningful letters to one another.

It is significant they both died 50 years after the signing of the Constitution; they both died on July 4th. And the last words of John Adams, he said, "Jefferson still lives." And then he died. Adams did not know that within a few minutes later in Jefferson said to his family, "Is it the fourth yet?" They said, "Yes." And that was his last words. "Is it the fourth?" And he died.

I am humbled by these U.S. leaders (Adams and Jefferson) for forgiving one another and repairing their lifelong friendship. It encourages me to want to be a peacemaker like Jesus talked about in Matthew five, the beatitudes; also in first Corinthians 5 God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

My heart and mind are deeply touched by both of these sacrifices & quote from two of our martyred and mourned U.S. presidents-

Lincoln’s sacrifice to free slavery & unite our states (freedom from the British to the freedom of all men, including the Black man)

Abraham Lincoln said that he was freeing every slave that was in the succeeding states of the United States of America. The principles that underlay the foundation of the United States of America led to the emancipation of every man including the black man in 1863.

1839 June Springfield meeting-

Abraham Lincoln “the guarantee of the right of conscience, as found in our Constitution, is most sacred and inviolable, and one that belongs no less to the Catholic than to the Protestant,” and that “all attempts to abridge or interfere with these rights, either of Catholics or Protestants, directly or indirectly, have our decided disapprobation and shall have our most effective opposition.” (Even at the last Cabinet meeting the day the bullet took his life)Lincoln—says Mr. Welles— “hoped there would be no persecution, no bloody work, after the war was over.”

U.S. SEN. JOHN F. KENNEDY: Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Houston, Texas, September 12, 1960-…

“ I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute- where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be a Catholic) how to act and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote- where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference-and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish-where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source-where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials-and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.”…

I truly believe God was behind the founding of our beloved US country, the Declaration of Independance , and the Constitution.

As Jesus in Matthew 5:14 encourages us to be a light on a hill- For example the many American Bible societies, including the Gideons, giving billions of gift Bibles worldwide.

Please protect the Johnson Amendment, which I believe protects religious liberty, for everyone, no matter their background.

Personally, I was so inspired learning more about religious liberty- with 50 students to Wittenberg/Wartburg Germany, for Martin Luther’s 500 year, Protestant Reformation anniversary-

Learning of honest, humble heroes, who loved God and their Bibles and others, more than themselves.

I truly wished some of my friends and family could be on the trip with me, and was so excited when this educational history YouTube channel started that same year.

“Lineage Journey” (meaningful European & American history clips)

https://youtu.be/fY6snG5XGwo?is=MEuuUr_sOzqKLbnb

"Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it" by George Santayana.

Proverbs 29:18 Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

This true history testimony encouraged my family recently, and is a good example of wanting to protect religious liberty for everyone.

In the Soviet Union, a Seventh-day Adventist, Christian pastor named Sergeant Stepan Petrovich was arrested for his faith and sent to a Siberian labor camp. There, he was given an impossible task — to plow a large field with only one weak ox and finish it within six days every week. However, because he kept the Sabbath holy, (Saturday Ex.20:8-11;Gen2:2-3; Lev23:32; Lk.4:16;23:54-24:1;Isaiah 58:13-14&66:22-23) he refused to work

on that day. The camp commander mocked him, saying his faith would make him fail and bring punishment. But a miracle happened - even though Stepan worked only six days a week, his ox and fieldwork always finished faster than those who worked all seven days. The ox seemed to gain supernatural strength and endurance, especially on Fridays before the Sabbath. (Isa40:31) This amazed everyone in the camp, including the commander, who eventually came to respect Stepan's faith and recognized the power of God behind the miracle.

It encouraged me growing up when my grandma would share one of her favorite quotes, that we have nothing to fear for the future as we remember how God has led in the past (like first Samuel 7:12 … hither to has the Lord led us)and Hebrews chapter 11 of faith Heb.11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Heb.12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Rom8:32-34,38-39)

Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. (precious promises I pray for myself our country & world, and our families Jn3:16; Jn14:1-3; Mt28:18-20) Isa 41:13 For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

My sincere prayer is that we all keep our eyes on Jesus Revelation 14:4 …following the lamb wherever he goes…Our good Shepherd promises he has other sheep He is also calling…(John10:16,29) may we each be a humble part of Jesus great Gospel commission through the Holy Spirit Matthew 28:18–20

Jesus rescue plan Revelation 14:6-12 everlasting, saving gospel Rev 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth (The Messages of the Three Angels Rev14:6-12)

Prayers for much wisdom and grace Prov3:5-6 & Dan 12:3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. In Jesus, loving counsel in Matthew 24 for end times, right in the middle such hope Matthew 24:14 and this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for witness to all nations, and then then end will come. praise God

Dear US religious liberty & government friends you do not have an easy job and have families you love

As we trust our Beloved Bibles,

God’s saving love letter to each of us,

Jesus promises to come back and take us to be with him, (John 14:1-3 & Jesus longest most precious prayer John 17 he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane Mat26:39 Not my will but your will be done (to Father God). I believe our merciful High Priest Jesus is still praying John 17 saving promises for each of us right now ...

John 17:3 (KJV)
And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.
...John 17:17 (KJV)
Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.
...John 17:24 (KJV)
Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am;
Hebrews 7:25 (KJV)
Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

to our forever heaven reunion,when our beloved Savior wipes away our tears. Rev21:4

I dedicate this religious liberty testimony song to my US country, our families, and most of all our beloved Savior

Phil2:5-11 Php 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...7...and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Php 2:9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

Act 5:29 “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” All praise and honor to you, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

https://youtu.be/usxC8HvYVNY?is=q1eSHNdByB5SPn_o

Continued prayers & promises-For our president, government leaders, and our US chaplain, Barry Black(For each of our families Jn3:16 &Dan12:3; Rev7:14-17& 14:6-12& 19:7;15:3&21:4)

for you all and our country

your sister in Christ,

Sincerely,

Heather Shurtliff

Ogden, Utah

From: Roger Seheult <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Roger Seheult, MD
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 05:46:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the work you have undertaken to protect Americans from religious discrimination. As a committed Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist, I strongly believe that people should be free to live according to their faith without coercion, retaliation, or unequal treatment by the government.

However, I am deeply concerned by several recommendations in the draft report that appear to weaken the separation of church and state. In particular, I am concerned by the proposal to repeal the Johnson Amendment, the expansion of government funding for religious institutions, and the suggestion that the church-state boundary should be understood as a "bridge."

The separation of church and state is not hostility toward Christianity or religion. It is one of the principal protections that allows faith to remain free. It protects the government from being controlled by religious institutions, but it also protects churches from political control, financial dependence, and interference in matters of conscience and doctrine.

Religious leaders must remain free to preach about moral questions, public issues, and the responsibilities of citizenship. That is different, however, from turning churches into instruments of partisan political campaigns. Repealing the Johnson Amendment could place enormous pressure on pastors and congregations to endorse candidates, raise political money, and align themselves with political parties. Once partisan politics enters the pulpit, it can easily divide congregations and compromise the spiritual mission of the church.

I am similarly concerned about expanding federal grants, contracts, and other funding arrangements while allowing recipients to continue expressly religious activities. Faith-based organizations perform tremendous work in education, healthcare, humanitarian relief, and service to the poor. Nevertheless, when government money enters a religious institution, government oversight and political expectations often follow. The government must then decide which organizations qualify, which religious practices are acceptable, and how public funds may be used. This places both religious liberty and government neutrality at risk.

My concern is not directed against religion. It arises precisely because I value religion and want it protected. Christianity does not need the power or funding of the state to accomplish its mission. Faith is strongest when it advances through truth, service, persuasion, and the working of conscience—not through political privilege or governmental power.

I respectfully ask the Commission to revise the report by preserving a meaningful separation between church and state, retaining the Johnson Amendment's prohibition against partisan campaign activity by tax-exempt churches, and ensuring that public funds are not used to support inherently religious worship, instruction, or evangelism.

Government should protect the free exercise of every faith while remaining neutral among religions and between religion and nonreligion. That principle has protected American religious liberty for generations. Weakening it may produce unintended consequences that will ultimately harm the very churches and believers the Commission seeks to defend.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Roger Seheult, MD
California

From: Barbara Bailey <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Barbara A. Bailey
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 07:40:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a follower of Jesus and member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I am troubled that the Commission wants to remove the wall of separation between the church and state and build a "bridge". Thousands of years of history of many nations proves that when church and state are joined, persecution is the result. Our founding fathers clearly understood that and did their best to prevent that from happening here. As a result, this nation has been blessed by God and used in His service to preserve religious liberty. It is tragic to see misguided efforts to undo what they accomplished. This nation will not last another 250 years if church and state are joined.

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

Grace and peace to you,
Barbara A. Bailey
Lisbon, Ohio
Bibleinfo.com
3ABNBibleanswers.com
WERN.Live

From: Daniel Fickett <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Separation of Church and State - Daniel Fickett
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 08:15:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am the Religious Liberty Representative of my local church in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. I have been concerned by the recommendations proposed to the DOJ by the committee to repeal all of The Johnson Amendment which permits freedom of expression by individuals and denominations and the expansion of funding religious organizations. These recommendations oppose the principles laid out in our constitution and make way for politics to interfere with church missions. These recommendations incentivize churches to endorse political candidates which may lead to church doctrinal change in favor of government grants or tax incentives. I go to church because I want to hear the Word of God not a political advertisement. This is not a good look for the local church and will not aid the Great Commission given to us by Jesus.

Respectfully yours,
Daniel Fickett
Sent from my iPhone

From: Todd Wesslen <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Recommendations 1 and 9 - Todd Wesslen
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 08:16:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing in regards to the recommendations of the religious liberty commission to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026. Much of the recommendations I agree with, however I would like to voice concerns about the 1st and 9th recommendations [1] with regards to conflict between the recommendations and the warnings given by founding fathers on the dangers of the unification of church and state.

I believe that Chair Dan Patrick has missed the mark on the constitutionality of the concept of separation of church and state. The committee recommended that the DOJ "issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." [2] 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] This understanding is 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.

Sincerely,

Todd E Wesslen
Member, Visalia Seventh-Day Adventist Church
Visalia, CA
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[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: Samuel Calvelage <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protecting Religious Liberty Through the Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 08:21:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to share my perspective on the vital importance of preserving the constitutional principle of religious liberty in the United States.

The First Amendment beautifully balances two essential protections: the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. Together, they ensure that no citizen is forced to adhere to a particular faith, while fiercely protecting the right of every individual to worship—or not worship—according to their own conscience.

True religious liberty requires government neutrality. While the principle of the "separation of church and state" protects religious institutions from government overreach, it also ensures the state does not favor one faith over another.

Our nation thrives on its diversity of thought and belief. While public officials have every right to hold personal religious convictions, their official duty is to govern in a manner that respects the rights of *all* Americans, regardless of their faith tradition.

Defending religious liberty is not about removing faith from the public square; it is about ensuring the state remains neutral so that everyone can live freely without coercion.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to upholding these foundational constitutional rights for all Americans.

Sincerely,

Samuel Calvelage

Theology Student - Southern Adventist University

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State- Carol Gallimore
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 08:41:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

This great experiment called The United States of America was founded by many seeking religious freedom from other countries. The ability to worship God according to the dictates of one's conscience is a most treasured right. Our founding fathers landed on a form of government correctly called a Constitutional Republic – a form of government which allows the majority to enjoy their rights and freedoms while also respecting and protecting the rights of the minority.

For 250 years, we have all enjoyed religious freedom – the ability to worship according to the dictates of our consciences regardless of our religious beliefs. The wall of separation between church and state has been instrumental in preserving this freedom and ensured religious liberty for all, no matter the religious persuasion.
It is true that the words, "separation of church and state" do not appear in the constitution, however, the first amendment makes it clear that there is a separation with these words, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;"

When asked about rendering tribute to Caesar, Jesus replied in Matthew 22:21, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Here, Christ made a distinction between the two, implying they have different requirements.

The combining of church and state poses a number of problems which must be addressed. Initially, there is a collision with the First Amendment. Will this Amendment be repealed? Next, whose religion will the state promote and honor? Or will it be a new religion altogether? Again, if it is the religion of the majority, how will the minority be able to perform their worship? Governing is difficult. If the state is involved, it will be expedient to have a one-size-fits-all religion, rather than support the various forms of worship and differing belief systems.

Another question to consider, who then has ultimate power? Does the church rule over the state? Does the state rule over the church? Either of these structures will create problems which do not currently exist. Ultimately, one party will have to answer to, and do the bidding of the other.

Without question, as has occurred in other countries, the combining of church and state will lead to persecution for individuals who would like to worship according to the dictates of their consciences but must worship according to the state religion.
As a Seventh-day Adventist, I must strongly object to the removal of the wall of separation between church and state, and respectfully request the Commission consider the rights and beliefs of those individuals who may not be in the majority, for there can be no Religious Liberty if everyone cannot worship according to the dictates of their consciences.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this response to the Commission.

Sincerely,

Carol Gallimore

Tennessee

From: Mark Saethre <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Mark Saethre
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 09:09:57 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I was deeply concerned to learn that the Commission is considering replacing the historic separation between church and state with what has been described as a "bridge." Respectfully, I believe such a change would weaken one of the most important safeguards ever established for both religious freedom and the church itself.

The separation between church and state was not created to marginalize faith or restrict religious expression. It was established largely because people of faith understood the dangers that arise when civil power and religious authority become intertwined. Throughout history, whenever governments have gained influence over religious institutions—or religious institutions have sought the support and power of government—the result has too often been corruption, coercion, and a loss of spiritual integrity.

A bridge between church and state may sound appealing, but bridges are designed to allow traffic in both directions. What begins as cooperation can gradually become dependence. Government funding often brings government expectations. Political support can lead to political influence. Churches that seek benefits from the state may eventually find themselves pressured to compromise convictions in order to maintain those benefits. The church's mission is best served when its loyalty remains fully devoted to God rather than divided by political interests.

The wall of separation has never been the enemy of religion. On the contrary, it has been one of religion's greatest protections. It preserves the freedom of churches to preach, teach, and minister according to conscience without interference from the state. It also protects government from becoming entangled in religious matters that are beyond its proper authority.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission not to replace this proven safeguard with a closer union of church and state. The wall of separation has protected religious liberty for generations. Rather than dismantling it, we should strengthen our commitment to the principle that faith flourishes best when it is free from government control and political entanglement.

Please preserve the protections that have served both church and state so well. In doing so, you will help safeguard the liberty of future generations and uphold the independence of the church that so many believers have valued throughout history.

Attached is a copy of the “Pillars of Freedom” comment on this subject and I am in full agreement with it.

Respectfully,

Mark Saethre

Yellville, Arkansas

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

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DOJ-RLC Comment-019903

these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

DOJ-RLC Comment-019913

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

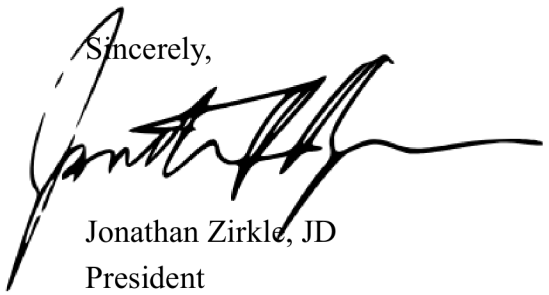
[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019914

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-019915

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment- Separation if Church and State- Tsai Yen Saethre
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 09:41:45 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I was deeply concerned to learn that the Commission is considering replacing the historic separation between church and state with what has been described as a "bridge." Respectfully, I believe such a change would weaken one of the most important safeguards ever established for both religious freedom and the church itself.
The separation between church and state was not created to marginalize faith or restrict religious expression. It was established largely because people of faith understood the dangers that arise when civil power and religious authority become intertwined. Throughout history, whenever governments have gained influence over religious institutions—or religious institutions have sought the support and power of government—the result has too often been corruption, coercion, and a loss of spiritual integrity.
A bridge between church and state may sound appealing, but bridges are designed to allow traffic in both directions. What begins as cooperation can gradually become dependence. Government funding often brings government expectations. Political support can lead to political influence. Churches that seek benefits from the state may eventually find themselves pressured to compromise convictions in order to maintain those benefits. The church's mission is best served when its loyalty remains fully devoted to God rather than divided by political interests.
The wall of separation has never been the enemy of religion. On the contrary, it has been one of religion's greatest protections. It preserves the freedom of churches to preach, teach, and minister according to conscience without interference from the state. It also protects government from becoming entangled in religious matters that are beyond its proper authority.
For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission not to replace this proven safeguard with a closer union of church and state. The wall of separation has protected religious liberty for generations. Rather than dismantling it, we should strengthen our commitment to the principle that faith flourishes best when it is free from government control and political entanglement.
Please preserve the protections that have served both church and state so well. In doing so, you will help safeguard the liberty of future generations and uphold the independence of the church that so many believers have valued throughout history.
Attached is a copy of the “Pillars of Freedom” comment on this subject and I am in full agreement with it.

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Respectfully,

Tsai Saethre
Yellville, Arkansas

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

DOJ-RLC Comment-019927

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

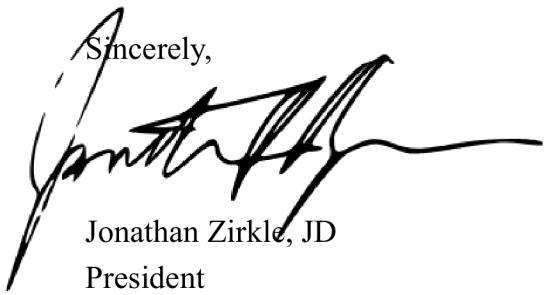
[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019928

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-019929

From: "Eva J. Tompkins, Esq." <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] My Response to the Religious Liberty Commission's Report, Issued June 2026
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 09:43:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

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 (Hereinafter "RLC") Draft Report, Issued June 2026

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

I am a New York lawyer and a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian. As such I love, value, and keep the Biblical Sabbath, which is to be kept holy on the 7th day of the week, Saturday, which God instituted and sanctified at creation (Genesis 2:1-3), which was commanded in the Ten Commandments as the 4th commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), which Jesus kept throughout His life (Luke 4:16), and which His closest friends and disciples kept at the time of His death and resurrection (Luke 23:54-56; Luke 24:1-2).

Unfortunately, the majority of the Christian world does not keep the Biblical Sabbath holy. Sadly, it is only a minority of the Christian world that remembers the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as is commanded in Exodus 20:8-11.

If church or religious activity is mingled with the state, state action or government authority, by a "bridge" or otherwise, it will inevitably lead to the preference of one religion over another. We have seen this time and again throughout history, as beautifully described by the comments submitted by Heritage and Hope Ministry (https://heritageandhope.org/) and Pillar of Freedom (https://pillaroffreedom.org/). I agree with both of their comments and responses to the RLC's Report and I hereby incorporate both herein by reference. Their respective comments can be found here:

1. Heritage and Hope Ministry: https://youtu.be/hWvJaRhnPO0?si=y7yNhARBsKxuSM4W
2. Pillar of Freedom: https://drive.google.com/file/d/13wd1AsF3m6STwD-v0ywpXFYnI-VRv8TF/view?usp=drive_link

I object to the Religious Liberty Commission Report's dismissal and denigration of the metaphor of the "wall of separation between church and state." The wall of separation between church and state DOES exist in our U.S. Constitution. Although those particular words are not used, the concept of the wall of separation of church and state is memorialized and established in the First Amendment by the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause, as follows: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” U.S. Const. amend. I, cl. 1.

The purpose of these two clauses set forth in the First Amendment is to keep separate church and state, so that the two are not mingled by a "bridge" or otherwise. Religious freedom and liberty of conscience cannot exist without this separation of church and state. Liberty of conscience is the fundamental right of an individual to follow their own moral and religious beliefs without coercion, interference, or punishment from the government or society. The separation of church and state is vitally and critically important to preserve and protect every individual person's freedom to think, believe, and act according to one's own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority. It is vital to protect every individual from coercion, in order that no one is forced to act against their conscience, nor penalized for their sincere beliefs.

The preservation of the separation between church and state is vital to avoid state or government's preference of one religion over another, in order that all people can enjoy the freedom to think, believe, and act according to one's own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to:
1. Reconsider, retract and redraft its report;
2. Reconsider and reject any interpretation of the U.S. Constitution that diminishes, dismisses or denigrates the historic separation of church and state;
Maintain proper boundaries between the state and government authority and matters of conscience, to preserve liberty of conscience;
3. Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities;
4. Withdraw any recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment, and
5. Consider fully enforcing the Johnson Amendment, which would restrict the political activities of churches.

Thank you for considering my thoughts, objections and recommendations on this matter.

With kind regards,
Eva J. Tompkins, Esq.

From: Tim Lass <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 10:47:58 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

Greetings from the Heartland....

I wish to add my voice to those who seek to defend our religious freedoms by speaking against the repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

Doing that would only divide houses of worship, and turn them into partisan Super PACs with little oversight; and replace devotion to The Savior, with devotion to political saviors who cannot make anyone a better person.

Churches are supposed to be united in thought and mission, but several divisive issues have crept in, separating friends and even relatives; and now you want to add another? The world of politics is by its very nature, divisive. The church doesn't need to be burdened by any more division.

I fully endorse the response to your proposal found on the Pillar of Freedom website, which I have attached. I, as a tax paying American, am praying that you'll do the right thing, and keep politics out of religion.

Sincerely,
Tim Lass
Benton, IL

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

DOJ-RLC Comment-019942

Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

DOJ-RLC Comment-019943

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

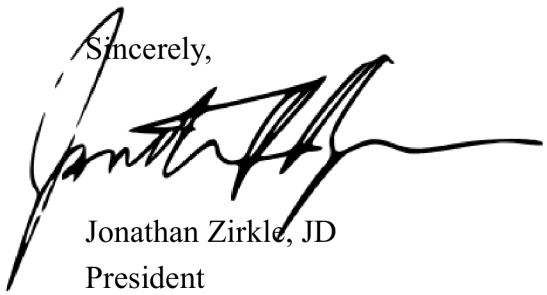
[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019944

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-019945

From: Sing4 Joy1844 <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 11:12:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

“Land of the free and home of the brave.” It quite troubles me as a law-abiding and honored citizen of the United States of America to read that the Commission wants to remove the wall of separation of church and state, the very value that our forefathers understood by their own experience with the shackles of Great Britain. As you know, history is clear as to the dire results, on both sides, when church and state is united. Precious blood has been shed for our unalienable rights granted to us by our Creator God for “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

It is encumbered upon each of you to do all within your abilities to protect those rights for every person regardless of race, religion, gender or national origin. As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I don’t vie for my religious freedom alone, but for the Constitutional and first amendment rights of all. My mother came to this country from Mexico and is so proud now to be an American citizen with the freedom that our nation affords, enjoys and has protected.

Please uphold and fully enforce the Johnson Amendment to keep us the “land of the free and the home of the brave.”

Sincerely,

Sonia Ball

Ooltewah, TN

"*If life* gives you LIMES...just rearrange the letters *and return a SMILE*!"

From: Sue Patterson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State- Sue Patterson
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 11:13:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a concerned citizen regarding the recommendations of this commission to "bridge" Separation of Church and State. The "Wall" was originally and still applicably a protection for people of faith. Religious freedom will only be found under the Separation of Church and State. I am requesting that there be a re-evaluation of this agenda for the sake of our countries freedoms! As a Seventh-day-Adventist, I believe through an understanding of past history that when Church and State unite, there is always persecution! I am totally against this!

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. We should keep the Wall! Please implement them!

Sincerely,

Sue Patterson
Hickory, North Carolina

Sent from my iPad

From: mel val <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support for the Separation of Church and State and the Protection of Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 11:14:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Coordination Office,

I am writing to express my strong support for the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state and the vital role it plays in protecting the religious freedom of all Americans.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe that faith must always be a matter of personal conviction, not government coercion. Genuine worship can never be produced by force. Throughout history, when civil governments have aligned themselves with a particular religion or denomination, the rights of those with different beliefs have often been restricted or denied.

History provides many examples of the dangers that arise when church and state become intertwined. During the Protestant Reformation, both Protestant and Catholic governments at various times persecuted those who held different religious beliefs. Anabaptists, for example, were imprisoned and executed by both Catholic and Protestant authorities because their convictions differed from the state-supported churches. Likewise, Baptists, Quakers, and other minority Christian groups experienced discrimination, imprisonment, and exclusion from civil rights in various colonies before the United States adopted constitutional protections for religious liberty.

These examples remind us that the issue is not simply one religion oppressing another. Even different Christian denominations have, at times, used governmental power to suppress fellow Christians whose beliefs differed on matters such as baptism, the Sabbath, worship practices, or church authority. Whenever the government favors one denomination, the freedom of all others is placed at risk.

The separation of church and state protects every person’s right to worship according to conscience—or not to worship at all—without fear of government preference, discrimination, or coercion. It allows Catholics, Protestants, Seventh-day Adventists, Orthodox Christians, Evangelicals, Jews, Muslims, and people of every faith or no faith to practice their beliefs peacefully under equal protection of the law.

For Seventh-day Adventists, religious liberty is not merely a constitutional principle but a biblical one. We believe that God invites willing obedience rather than forced compliance. Freedom of conscience reflects the dignity that God has given every human being. Government serves its proper role by protecting civil order and individual rights, while the

church fulfills its mission through persuasion, teaching, and service rather than political power.

I respectfully encourage the Department of Justice to continue defending the constitutional protections that preserve religious liberty for all Americans. A government that neither establishes nor favors one religion provides the best safeguard for the diverse beliefs that have long strengthened our nation.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to protecting the religious freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

Respectfully,

Melquisedec Valera

Copy That

From: Carla Hearn-Willard <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 11:48:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am writing in regard to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report. When this country was founded, most citizens were either Christian or Deist. The right of these Christians to practice their religion in their own way, apart from the Church of England, is one of the foundations of this country. Today our country includes many religions, and many denominations of Christianity. The separation of church and state protects members of all religions (including Christians) from having someone else's faith pushed on them. I was raised Seventh-day Adventist, and am now a member of the Unitarian Universalist church. As a life-long member of faith communities that fall outside mainstream Protestant Christianity, I do not want my children being isolated or excluded because they don't want to participate in school prayers that don't fit our family's beliefs. I don't want Adventist children, as I was growing up, being pressured to participate in public school events held on their Sabbath (the observance of which is protected by separation of church and state). I also consider the rights of non-Christians not to be taught Christianity in school. Separation of church and state exists to protect everyone. Please consider this while creating your report. Thank you.

From: Karen Baxter <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Karen A. Baxter
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 11:51:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm alarmed that the Commission has concluded that there is no necessary "wall" of separation between the powers of the state and the powers of religion - in this case, the Christian religion. While I am a follower of Christ and would love it if all people would follow Christ's example, I would not want anyone to have to comply, by any level of force, with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures. Jesus compells no one though He has the Divine power to make us all comply with His will.

Protestants have forgotten the history of repressive church/state governments in Europe from whence many of our ancestors fled here for religious freedom. Whether Catholic or Protestant, people tended to enforce particular religious worship and dogmas upon the populace by state authority. Thousands died for freedom of conscience and freedom to worship as they felt led. State backed Islam and Marxism have also added thousands of lives taken in service to a majority religion or political ideology. I don't want the United States to repeat history, and current practice in places like Iran and North Korea, where personal convictions of conscience were/are punished by the state.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I'm a member of a minority Christian denomination. Already, some of my fellow Christian brethren consider Seventh-day Adventists as a cult and not Christians because our beliefs are unorthodox. I'm afraid of a return to persecution upon my sect by the majority of Christians who may hold this same view.

During the 1800's, some biblical, seventh-day Sabbath adherents were persecuted and prosecuted because they did not conform to the majority religious practices of their day. I don't want a repeat of that. I'm disappointed with Dr. Benjamin Carson, who is both a Seventh-day Adventist and Vice-Chairman of the Religious Liberty Commission. He should well know of the dangers of allowing a softening or redefining of strict separation between religious and state authorities.

Today, we like to think that we would never repeat the mistakes of the past. We like to think we're more enlightened, tolerant, and inclusive. We may have access to far more knowledge and technologies, but the news tells me that our sinful human characters remain the same throughout history. A lot of evil has been executed in the name of "the common good" or social compliance and cohesiveness.

The church doesn't need the government or its funding and shouldn't ask for its help in any way except in maintaining our Constitutional freedoms of religion, of speech, and of conscience. If the Founders wanted a state church relationship as in Europe, we would have today a state church like Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Anglicanism. We do not have a United States Church because the Founders understood the tyranny over conscience that a majority, state backed religion always imposed. Article VI even states that there should be no religious test for one to be able to hold office which was something that was done in other governments.

There isn't anything wrong with Christianity especially if it is practiced the way Jesus and His Apostles practiced it. All of them practiced faith in and worship of God according to His revealed will in His Scriptures. None of them demanded that the civil authorities enforce their religious beliefs or contribute to their flourishing. It was the Jewish "church" leaders that used Rome to murder Jesus, the Author of their faith. European churches also found it too easy to enforce religious compliance "for the common good" through the crown's forces. Churches

discovered political power and affluence and monarchs discovered more obedient subjects through the unholy power relationship between church and state.

Please be careful about your recommendations and asking for any governmental enforcement of them. Given fallen, human nature, you may be asking for a resurgence of religious intolerance inflicted upon the minorities by the majority, state approved religion. You might not like or outlive the Beast you let loose if you find yourselves in the minority.

Sincerely,

Karen A. Baxter

Lisbon Falls, ME

From: Amparo Becerra <[redacted]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Amparo Becerra Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission: I'm writing as a citizen to express my disagreement and 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. My grandparents and family suffered great persecution and even my great uncle was murdered for being part of the "wrong" faith in their home town. This was instigated by the local priests and aided and covered by the local authorities. My family found safety in this country and we have served the US in many capacities in the different army branches and as civilians. We are Seventh Day Adventist Christians. When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, it is bad for the church and the country alike. Separation isn't a secular idea; People of faith built it to protect

Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 12:08:07 -0400

Importance: Normal

From: Donna Thompson <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Donna Thompson
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 12:24:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of Religious Liberty Commission:

I am opposed to removing the "wall" between church and state, and replacing it with a "bridge". The first amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". And while this action is intended to protect churches from government interference, historically when churches have had too much power, they have tended to use the government to enforce practicing religion according to their own beliefs. The founding Fathers of our great nation intended for all people to have freedom to worship according to their own dictates, and not be forced to worship against their individual beliefs.

I strongly believe that removing the separation of church and state will gradually become a tool to persecute citizens of our country by forcing them to worship according to what those in government leadership desire. This is not good for our country and its citizens.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist christian. I believe that Jesus invites us to follow Him in truth. He did not force anyone to follow Him while He was on this earth. He lovingly invited all people. We need to have this same mind that is in Christ.

So please do not remove the separation of church and state in any way.

Respectfully,
Donna Thompson

[redacted]
[redacted]

From: Klinger Lurentt <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Klinger Lurentt
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 12:33:58 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: PastedGraphic-3.png

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. I write from Brazil — but the principle at stake in your draft report is not bound by national borders, and my church's history with it is not abstract.

I have spent time studying the history of religious liberty — from the union of church and state in fourth-century Rome, through centuries of persecution under state churches in Europe, including the imprisonment of dissenters like John Bunyan in England, to the men and women who crossed the Atlantic on the Mayflower and after, seeking freedom from exactly that kind of religious coercion. What strikes me most, studying that history, is not simply that they were persecuted — it is that many of the same colonies, once in power, persecuted others in turn. Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts in 1636 for insisting that civil government had no authority over conscience. Quakers were later hanged in Boston. The lesson is not that any one faith is dangerous when it holds power. It is that the union of religion and civil power is dangerous, whoever holds it. That is why the American experiment — a government with no authority to establish or suppress religious conscience — was something genuinely new, and why I take it seriously enough to write now, while your report is still being finalized.

That same lesson is not only European history. It is closer than we think. Between 1885 and 1896, Seventh-day Adventists in this country were fined, jailed, and sentenced to labor on chain gangs in Tennessee and Arkansas — not for any wrong done to a neighbor, but for quietly working their own fields on Sunday after resting on the Bible Sabbath. These were not fringe punishments; they were the direct result of Sunday laws defended, at the time, as expressions of the nation's Christian morality.

In 1888, our representative A. T. Jones testified before the U.S. Senate against a proposed national Sunday-rest bill. He grounded his argument in Christ's own words — "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21) — and stated the principle plainly: "The principle upon which we stand is that civil government is civil, and has nothing to do in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way." Jones distinguished between duties we owe one another — properly protected by civil law — and duties we owe to God alone, which no civil power may enter: "We deny, forever, the right of any civil government to legislate in anything that pertains to men's duty to God under the first four commandments."

That distinction is why several recommendations in the draft report concern me: reinterpreting the Establishment Clause, supporting mandated Ten Commandments displays in public schools, and expanding government-sponsored religious instruction. However well-intentioned, each asks civil government to act in a jurisdiction that was never its own.

Jones went further still, warning even believers who stood to benefit from such legislation: "No man can allow any legislation in behalf of the religion, or the religious observances, in which he himself believes, without forfeiting his own religious freedom." My church has held that warning for over a century — not out of hostility to faith, but because we have paid, directly, for what happens when it is ignored.

I ask the Commission to affirm that civil government's jurisdiction ends where duties to God begin, and to defend both religion clauses of the First Amendment — establishment and free exercise — with equal vigor. That

combination, and only that combination, is full religious liberty.

Respectfully,
Klinger Lurentt

Klinger Lurentt

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From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 12:45:04 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

My freedom is precious. Once it is surrendered, history shows it is rarely regained without great suffering.
As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe this issue is more than political. It is deeply personal. My faith teaches me that religious liberty is a God-given right, not a privilege granted by government. Genuine faith cannot be legislated, coerced, or enforced. The moment the state begins promoting, protecting, or enforcing religious practice, it stops protecting liberty and starts picking winners and losers.
History has already shown us where that road leads.
When church and state unite, it may begin with noble intentions, but it never ends there. Good intentions eventually give way to political pressure, religious favoritism, and the silencing of those who refuse to conform. The victims have changed throughout history, but the pattern never has.
Our Founders understood this. They had seen the destruction caused when governments and churches became partners. They wisely established a nation where faith would remain free from government control and government would remain free from religious control. That principle has protected Americans of every faith for generations.
Please do not allow that safeguard to be weakened.
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,
Jackie Metz

From: Dwight Hibbert <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 12:55:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greetings,

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian I am very concerned about the breakdown on morality and law and order in society. I remember as a child growing up there was so much respect, politeness and cordiality. As kids we were not bombarded with pornagraphy, violence on TV, in the classroom or in wider society. This has certainly changed and not for the better. So what's the solution to counter this lawlessness and breakdown in society? Society is composed of homes and families. If there is a breakdown within the family unit it will impact society. I remember growing up there was the reading of the Bible in our homes. In addition to that, each week it was customary to for me to attend weekly Church service.

At the age of 13 I fully committed my life to Jesus through baptism. The early training I received made that decision very easy. My upbringing really shaped my life as a adult and made me what I an today.

So what's the solution to the breakdown of society? The homes. Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to train and raised children according to Biblical truths. A word of caution though. We're living in a society and nation that is composed of people with many different cultures and beliefs. So how do we or should we go about this? I would suggest that we engage in public dialogs and discussions on how to improve our families and home life while respecting people's right to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience. In other words, as well meaning as union of Church and state is and the legislation of morality is in order to counter the breakdown of society, it is a very slippery slope."

History has proven that this union of Church and state creates more problems than it actually solves. Let's go back to the founding of the United States of America; The Puritans and Pilgrims were forced to flee Europe because of persecution that was the direct result of a union of Church and state. They were fleeing persecution by the King of England and from Roman Catholicism which was the only religion that was allowed in Europe. Any deviation from Catholicism was met with the severest punishment, torture and even death (been burnt at the stakes).

They risked their lives and came to America because they wanted to practice their religion and worship God according to the dictates of their conscience without been forced by the state to do so. In short, they fled Europe because of state sponsored religion.

What's very interesting and fascinating is that the very same thing (Church state union and state sponsored religion) that they were running from they brought to this "new world" America. It was so bad in early America that Roger Williams was forced to flee in the dead of winter because he opposed this union of Church and state. These same folks who had seen and lived through the horrors of Church state union and state sponsored religion did not know know how to detangle themselves from from they were running from.

Things were so bad in early America to the point were Seventh-day Adventists were arrested and sent to chain gangs for the violation of "Sunday Blue Laws."

It was God who raised up America as a land of religious and civil liberty where people could worship God according to the dictates of their conscience. This land was raised up to provide an asylum for the oppressed.

In concluding, the Church and the government operate in fundamentally distinct realms. While government is divinely ordained to maintain civil order and administer justice, the Church exists to nurture the spiritual well-being of society. These institutions operate with entirely different mindsets and objectives—"spiritual things are spiritually discerned." When these spheres overlap, it inevitably leads to dangerous overreach. History stands as a solemn warning, bearing a fearful record of the oppression and conflict that inevitably follow any attempt at a Church-state union.

I am therefore urging this body to let the separation of Church and state remain separate. History has proven that whenever there is a union of Church and state minorities and dissenters suffer persecution. In short, under a union of Church and state no dissent is tolerated.

While the "phrase separation of Church and state" does not appear in the United States Constitution "the principle" is there in the first amendment:

"**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**."

The state has jurisdiction over the second take of the God’s ten commandments as it pertains to man's relationship to his fellow men and to the government. This the government can legislate.

However, as it pertains to the first table of God's ten commandments, it is solely between an individual and God. People has a choice to obey or not to obey, or to worship or not to worship, to pray or not to pray. God gave everyone the freedom to choose. In matters of conscience and faith man is accountable to God only.

So I asked the proponents of the union of Church and state and those who are advocating for the legislation of mandatory Sunday observance, are you sure you want to revisit this "dark chapter" in America's history?

H.G.

H.G.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019959

From: Jonathan Ferris <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Marine Veterans objections to Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:01:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to express my deep concern about the direction of religious liberty in the United States and the growing movement toward cooperation between religious institutions and the power of the federal government.

I write not only as a Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist, but also as a United States Marine veteran who served in Afghanistan in 2011. I served my country because I believed I was defending freedom—the freedoms and constitutional rights of the American people and the system of government established to preserve them.

What increasingly concerns me today is that some of the greatest threats to liberty may not come from enemies abroad, but from dangers arising here at home when the principles that protect our freedoms are gradually abandoned.

I served to preserve the freedom of Americans to choose for themselves whom they will worship—or whether they will worship at all—and how they will worship according to the dictates of their own conscience. Religious faith must never be produced through coercion, government pressure, economic pressure, or an alliance between church and state.

The Religious Liberty Commission should remember what it historically meant to be Protestant and why Protestants once stood so firmly against the union of church and state. The Protestant Reformation was born, in part, from resistance to a religious system that claimed authority over conscience and used civil power to enforce religious conformity.

The Founding Fathers and framers of the Constitution understood the danger of concentrating power. The American system established divisions and limitations of governmental power because history demonstrated what can happen when too much authority is placed into the hands of one institution. The protection of religious liberty is likewise essential. Government must not become an instrument for enforcing the religious beliefs, practices, or institutions of any church.

Religious liberty is not merely the freedom to practice the religion of the majority. It is the freedom of conscience for everyone—including Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, members of other faiths, and those who profess no religion at all. If religious liberty protects only the beliefs favored by those presently holding political power, then it is not truly religious liberty.

History repeatedly demonstrates the danger that arises when religious institutions unite with the coercive power of the state. When government begins enforcing religious beliefs, practices, or institutions, dissenters eventually face pressure, discrimination, penalties, and, at its worst, persecution.

As a Seventh-day Adventist and a historicist in my understanding of Bible prophecy, I believe Revelation 13 gives a solemn warning about precisely such a development. Revelation describes an "image to the beast"—a system that reproduces the fundamental characteristics of the earlier union of religious and civil power.

The prophecy states:

"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…" — Revelation 13:12 (KJV)

It then declares:

"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: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark…" — Revelation 13:16–17 (KJV)

The language is unmistakably coercive: "he causeth all." The prophecy reaches every level of society—"small and great, rich and poor, free and bond"—and ultimately describes economic pressure being used against those who refuse to conform.

From the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of prophecy, the final conflict will center upon worship, the commandments of God, and the question of whether human authority has the right to override the conscience of the individual. Revelation contrasts those who submit to the beast and its image with those who remain faithful to God:

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." — Revelation 14:12 (KJV)

Seventh-day Adventists have historically understood the Sabbath–Sunday controversy within this larger issue of religious liberty and freedom of conscience. The concern is not that individuals voluntarily worship on Sunday. Every American must remain free to worship on Sunday, Saturday, Friday, another day, or no day at all according to conscience.

The danger arises when religious observance is given the force of civil law.

If government ever uses its authority to compel religious observance—including the enforcement of a particular day of worship or rest—then the issue is no longer simply theological. It becomes a question of whether the state has the authority to compel the conscience in matters belonging to God.

Those advocating closer cooperation between church and state may sincerely believe they are defending Christianity, morality, or the nation. But good intentions do not eliminate

the dangers of religious coercion. A government powerful enough to enforce one group's religious beliefs today is powerful enough to enforce another group's beliefs tomorrow.

The church does not need the sword of the state to advance the Gospel.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." — John 18:36 (KJV)

The Gospel advances through truth, persuasion, conviction, and the voluntary response of the human conscience—not through legislation, political power, economic penalties, or civil coercion.

I therefore urge the Religious Liberty Commission to defend religious liberty in its fullest and most genuine meaning. Defend the Catholic's freedom of conscience. Defend the Protestant's freedom of conscience. Defend the Jew, the Muslim, the Seventh-day Adventist, the person of another faith, and the person who chooses no religion at all.

But do not confuse the promotion of religion through government power with the defense of religious liberty.

As a Marine veteran, I did not serve so that one religious institution, coalition, or political movement could use the government to dictate matters of conscience to the American people. I served believing that Americans should remain free to make those decisions for themselves.

The greatest test of religious liberty is not whether we protect the beliefs with which we agree. It is whether we protect the conscience of those with whom we profoundly disagree.

The Constitution must remain a shield protecting freedom of conscience—not become a sword in the hands of religious majorities.

From my understanding of Scripture and history, a union of church and state does not ultimately protect Christianity. It corrupts the church, empowers the state, and places the conscience of the individual in danger. In prophetic terms, we should be exceedingly careful that, while claiming to defend religious liberty, we do not participate in constructing the very "image to the beast" against which Revelation warns.

I respectfully urge this Commission to defend the wall against government coercion in matters of faith and to remember that genuine religious liberty requires freedom of conscience for all.

Semper Fidelis,

Jonathan Ferris
United States Marine Corps Veteran
Afghanistan Veteran, 2011

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: Honest Harvest <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Chad Emig
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:02:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen and Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe that religious liberty and the separation of church and state are essential biblical and constitutional principles that protect the freedom of conscience God has given to every person. Our denomination has long defended these principles because history consistently demonstrates that when civil government becomes involved in advancing, funding, or regulating religion, both religious freedom and authentic faith suffer. Nations have suffered when governments have enforced religion through state power, but they have also suffered when governments have sought to suppress or control religion, as seen during the French Revolution. Lasting religious liberty is best preserved when government protects the freedom of conscience of all people without promoting, funding, or restricting religion.

America's commitment to religious liberty did not arise by accident. It was shaped by the painful lessons of religious persecution in England and Europe, where established churches often used the power of the state to compel belief and suppress dissent. Many who came to America sought refuge from that persecution, and the experiences of persecuted religious minorities—including Baptists imprisoned in colonial Virginia for preaching without government approval—influenced the adoption of the First Amendment's protections for religious liberty.

These safeguards have allowed people of every faith, including Seventh-day Adventists, to worship according to conscience without fear of government coercion or favoritism. I am therefore concerned that recommendations to expand government funding of religious activities and reduce restrictions on partisan political activity by churches would blur the vital distinction between church and state that has preserved both religious freedom and the independence of religious institutions. The government's responsibility is not to advance religion, but to protect the equal rights of every citizen to worship—or not worship—according to conscience. I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve these historic constitutional safeguards and maintain the separation of church and state as one of America's greatest protections for both religion and civil government, particularly those expanding government funding for religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

Chad Emig
Delton, MI

From: braxton bell <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State-Braxton and Yvette Bell
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:11:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

As Seventh-day Adventist, our view on the relationship between church and state is that they should remain institutionally separate. Our belief is rooted in the interpretation of the Bible, our understanding of religious liberty, and our reading of prophecy.

We as Adventists believe that genuine faith must be voluntary. God allows people to choose whether to follow Him (such as Joshua 24:15 and Revelation 22:17). The government should protect the freedom to worship—or not worship—without coercion.

Matthew 22:21:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

We as Adventists interpret this as establishing distinct spheres for civil government and religious obligation. Governments have legitimate authority in civil matters, but they should not dictate religious belief or practice.

We believe history shows that when churches gain political power, religious persecution often follows. Examples such as:

- **The medieval union of church and state in Europe.**
- **Persecution during the Roman Catholic Church's period of political influence (while recognizing that not all Catholics supported or participated in persecution).**
- **The persecution of Protestant dissenters and other minority religious groups.**

Our concern is not limited to any one denomination. We believe that **any** church that uses state power to enforce religious beliefs risks compromising both religion and civil liberty.

We know as Adventist biblical prophecy predicts a future alliance between religious and political powers before Christ's return.

- **Revelation chapter 13 describes civil governments enforcing religious observance.**
- **Daniel chapter 7 portrays religious-political powers that persecute believers.**
- **A future church–state alliance will pressure people in matters of worship.**
- **This will eventually include laws enforcing Sunday observance.**
- **Those who continue observing the seventh-day Sabbath will face increasing opposition.**

As Seventh-day Adventist, we actively support religious liberty for people of all faiths and those with no religion. We advocate that governments should:

- **Protect freedom of conscience.**
- **Avoid establishing or favoring a particular religion.**
- **Refrain from compelling religious observance.**
- **Treat all religious groups equally under the law.**

Our position can be summarized as follows:

- **Church and state have distinct God-given roles.**
- **Government should not enforce religious beliefs or worship.**
- **History demonstrates the dangers of church–state unions.**
- **Bible prophecy predicts a future union of religious and political power that will challenge freedom of conscience.**
- **Christians should support religious liberty for all people, regardless of their beliefs.**

From: Anthony Johnson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty: Keep Church and State Separate
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:19:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I deeply value religious liberty because it is rooted in both Scripture and the principles upon which the United States was founded. God invites worship that is freely chosen, never compelled. Genuine faith cannot exist where conscience is coerced.

Throughout history, whenever civil government has joined with religious authority to enforce matters of faith, the result has often been persecution, discrimination, and the loss of liberty for religious minorities. Seventh-day Adventists have long advocated for the separation of church and state—not because we oppose religion in public life, but because we believe both religion and government function best when each remains within its God-given sphere.

The First Amendment wisely protects both the free exercise of religion and prohibits the establishment of religion by the government. These complementary protections preserve the rights of all people—Christians, members of other faiths, and those with no religious affiliation—to live according to the dictates of conscience without fear of government preference or coercion.

As a person of faith, I encourage the Commission to strengthen protections for religious liberty while preserving the constitutional separation of church and state. Government should defend every individual's right to worship, speak, assemble, and live according to sincerely held religious convictions, provided those practices do not infringe upon the fundamental rights of others. At the same time, government should avoid policies that favor or promote one religion over another.

Protecting liberty of conscience for everyone reflects both the spirit of the Constitution and the biblical principle that faith must be voluntary. I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve these enduring principles so that religious freedom remains secure for all Americans, now and in the future.

Anthony Johnson

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To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
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Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:19:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

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Anthony Johnson

From: Daniel Jean-Francois <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Report Concerns
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:32:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft report.

My name is Daniel Jean-François, and I serve as an ordained minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I write as someone who deeply values both religious faith and the constitutional principles that have made the United States one of the greatest protectors of religious liberty in human history.

I am profoundly grateful to live in a nation where individuals are free to worship according to the dictates of conscience, or not worship at all, without fear of government coercion. Around the world, countless people continue to suffer imprisonment, discrimination, and persecution because of their religious beliefs. The freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment have allowed people of diverse faiths, including Seventh-day Adventists, to worship freely, preach the gospel, establish schools, publish religious literature, and contribute positively to society.

I especially appreciate the wisdom of the First Amendment. By prohibiting the establishment of religion while simultaneously protecting the free exercise of religion, our founders created a framework that safeguards both the church and the state. Government is prevented from controlling religion, and religion is protected from political manipulation. This constitutional balance has served our nation remarkably well for over two centuries.

After reading the Commission's draft report, I found much that I agree with. I appreciate its concern that Americans should never be penalized simply for holding sincere religious convictions. Every individual deserves equal protection under the law, and religious liberty should be defended consistently and impartially.

However, I also have significant concerns regarding portions of the report.

The report at times appears to treat the principles of church-state separation and religious liberty as though they were in tension with one another. From both a constitutional and historical perspective, I believe the opposite is true. The Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause work together. Government neutrality toward religion has been one of the greatest protections of genuine religious liberty, particularly for minority faiths.

I belong to a denomination whose history has consistently emphasized freedom of conscience for every person. Our pioneers defended religious liberty not merely for themselves but for Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, atheists, and all others. They recognized that once the government acquires the authority to favor one religious viewpoint, that same authority can eventually be used against those outside the majority.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when church and civil power become too closely united, religious liberty suffers. The danger is not only government hostility toward religion but also government preference for religion. Both ultimately undermine freedom of conscience.

I am also concerned that some recommendations in the report could unintentionally blur the proper distinction between the responsibilities of religious institutions and those of civil government. Religious

belief flourishes best when it is embraced voluntarily rather than promoted through governmental authority or endorsement. Genuine faith cannot be produced by political power.

The American principle of separating church and state did not arise from hostility toward religion but from the convictions of persecuted Christians such as Roger Williams. Williams argued that civil magistrates have authority over civil matters alone and are not "judges, governors, or defenders of the spiritual, or Christian, state and worship." He further observed that Christ "never directed His disciples to the civil magistrate for help in His cause." Having experienced religious persecution firsthand, Williams understood that protecting the independence of both church and state was essential to preserving genuine religious liberty.

Jesus Himself rejected political power as the means of advancing His kingdom. Standing before Pontius Pilate, He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight" (John 18:36). Roger Williams likewise warned that "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." History demonstrates that Christianity is weakened, not strengthened, when government is used to promote religious belief. Faith flourishes when it is freely chosen rather than politically encouraged.

For these reasons, I encourage the Commission to preserve policies that maintain governmental neutrality in matters of religion. Public institutions should remain welcoming to people of every faith and no faith by avoiding sectarian religious endorsements or practices. Likewise, institutions receiving public funding should administer their services fairly and equally to all. These principles uphold both the First Amendment and the Golden Rule by protecting the dignity and freedom of every person's conscience.

For more than two centuries, the First Amendment has protected both religion and government by ensuring that neither controls the other. That constitutional arrangement has enabled people of every faith—and those of no faith—to live together in freedom while allowing religious communities to flourish without political coercion.

As a Seventh-day Adventist minister, I urge the Commission to preserve the historic constitutional balance that has made the United States a beacon of religious liberty throughout the world. Religious liberty is strongest when government vigorously protects the free exercise of religion while refraining from establishing, endorsing, or favoring religion. Such a commitment honors both the Constitution and the biblical principle that faith must always be the voluntary response of a free conscience.

Thank you for considering these comments and for your service to our nation.

--
Blessings,

Daniel Jean-Francois
Lincolnton/Shelby SDA Church
PII



"When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us." DA 668

From: sender <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] My Public Comments for THE DRAFT REPORT of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:42:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am writing to express my concern and dissatisfaction that the existing draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission is not in the best interest of U.S. citizens and needs to be re-written to protect the safeguards already built into the constitution providing objectivity and non-favoritism for religious rights and freedom of its expression.

Being a Seventh-day Adventist, my church has historically spoken out against the government enacting laws that would restrict religious freedom, and I believe separation of church and state must be preserved.

Some specific issues at stake in your draft report I want to address:
1. I request the Johnson Amendment remain and be enforced.
2. I ask for neutrality in the government's relationship with religion whether it Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or any other.
3. And I object to funding religious education and clubs and non-profit activities.

Please bring my comments out for consideration and revise this draft.
Thank you,
Rebecca Vanmeter

From: Robert McLennan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - Separation of Church and State - Robert McLennan
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:54:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this public comment regarding the Commission's recommendations on religious liberty. I write as an American citizen, a Christian, and a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who is deeply grateful for the constitutional protections that have allowed people of every faith, or no faith, to live according to the dictates of conscience.

I respectfully urge the Commission to reject any proposal that would encourage a closer institutional relationship between religion and civil government or diminish the longstanding constitutional principle that government must remain neutral in matters of faith.

The genius of the American experiment has never been that government promoted religion. Rather, it has been that government protected the freedom of every individual to worship according to conscience without coercion or favoritism. The First Amendment established a framework that has enabled religious communities to flourish while safeguarding the rights of both majority and minority faiths alike.

History repeatedly demonstrates why this principle must be preserved. Whenever civil authority becomes closely aligned with religious authority, liberty of conscience is eventually compromised. Colonial America witnessed the persecution of Baptists, Quakers, Jews, Sabbath keepers, and others whose beliefs differed from the established churches of their day. These injustices helped shape the Founders' conviction that religious establishments and civil power should remain institutionally separate.

My own denomination experienced these dangers firsthand. During the late nineteenth century, Seventh-day Adventists who observed the biblical seventh-day Sabbath were prosecuted under Sunday closing laws that reflected the influence of the Protestant Christian majority. Some were fined, imprisoned, and even sentenced to convict labor for working on Sunday after faithfully observing the Sabbath on Saturday. Their experience illustrates how laws rooted in the religious convictions of the majority can burden the conscience of religious minorities, even when enacted with sincere intentions.

The broader lessons of world history reinforce the same truth. The medieval Inquisition, state-established churches in Europe, governments that have promoted religious extremism, and regimes that have suppressed religion altogether each represent different expressions of the same fundamental error: allowing civil authority to govern matters of

conscience. Whether government elevates religion or attempts to eliminate it, freedom suffers whenever the state assumes authority over humanity's relationship with God.

As a Christian, I believe faith must always be voluntary. Christ invited people to follow Him through truth, love, and persuasion—not through civil power or legal compulsion. Government possesses legitimate authority to protect public order, equal justice, and the constitutional rights of its citizens. The church has the sacred responsibility to proclaim the gospel and minister to people's spiritual needs. Each institution fulfills its highest purpose when it remains within its proper sphere.

Our nation's remarkable religious diversity is evidence that this constitutional balance has served America well. Churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, and countless other religious communities have been free to grow because government has generally refrained from establishing, directing, or favoring religion. These protections have benefited believers and nonbelievers alike and have strengthened both religious freedom and civil society.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Commission to recommend policies that preserve the historic constitutional safeguards protecting liberty of conscience. Government should neither advance nor inhibit religion but instead defend the equal rights of every citizen to believe, worship, or abstain from religious practice according to conscience.

The decisions made by this Commission will influence the future of religious liberty for generations to come. I urge you to preserve the constitutional principles that have made the United States a beacon of religious freedom throughout the world. History has shown the consequences of abandoning these protections. We should not repeat mistakes that have too often resulted in intolerance, discrimination, and the erosion of fundamental human rights.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these comments and for your service to our nation.

Blessings,

Robert McLennan MD

From: William Pitt <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – CHAPTERS 1, 2, 8 AND 14: SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE – Mr. WILLIAM PITT Esq.
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 13:56:09 -0400
Importance: High
Attachments: Pitt_W_-_PUBLIC_COMMENT_TO_THE_PRESIDENTIAL_RELIGIOUS_LIBERTY_COMMISSION_2026.pdf
Inline-Images: cid:clip_image001.png

PUBLIC COMMENT TO THE PRESIDENTIAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION:

Religious Liberty, the First Amendment and Constitutional Separation of Church and State

A Comparative Originalist Submission from an Australian/American Seventh-day Adventist and Constitutional Law Academic

Mr. William Pitt Esq.
B.Comm./M.Fin (1st Class Hons.), LLB (1st Class Hons.)

Lawyer | Lecturer in Constitutional Law | PhD Candidate (Law)
Victoria, Australia; for and on behalf of my adopted-mother in Arkansas, USA

Dear Chairman Patrick and Members
of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

RE: PUBLIC COMMENT – CHAPTERS 1, 2, 8 AND 14: SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE – Mr. WILLIAM PITT Esq.

I respectfully submit this public comment (see also attached in pdf format) concerning the Commission's June 2026 Draft Report, *America's First Freedom*.

Firstly, I wish to commend the Commission for affirming religious liberty as an indispensable human and constitutional freedom; defending the rights of religious believers to participate fully in public life; protecting freedom of conscience; and recognising the social contributions made by churches, religious schools, charities and faith-based institutions. Religious citizens must not be silenced, excluded from public benefits merely because they are religious, or compelled to abandon sincerely held beliefs as the price of participating in civil society.

Nevertheless, I respectfully object to the Draft Report's treatment of the constitutional separation of church and state. The Report states that the phrase "wall of separation between church and state" does not appear in the First Amendment, suggests that the idea gained prominence only in the mid-twentieth century, and recommends replacing the metaphorical "wall" with a "bridge"

between religion and the state.[1] It also recommends repeal of the Johnson Amendment and expanded governmental partnerships and funding involving religious institutions.[2] The Report's account is more nuanced than the blunt proposition that religious expression must be excluded from public life; indeed, it correctly rejects that proposition. But its broader dismissal of constitutional church–state separation mistakes misuse of the doctrine for non-existence of the doctrine itself. (Department of Justice)

I write as a lawyer, lecturer in Constitutional Law and PhD candidate undertaking comparative legal research into constitutional religious liberty and church–state separation under the United States and Australian Constitutions. I am a Seventh-day Adventist and have family residing in the United States, including my adopted mother and have residence in the USA. I therefore make this submission both in my own professional academic capacity and also as a person whose family, faith and research are directly affected by the continuing strength and ongoing influence of American religious-liberty protections.
My principal submission to the Commission is:

Constitutional 'separation of church and state' is not an isolated metaphor nor a modern judicial invention. The absence of the precise words 'separation of church and state' from the constitutional text does not establish any absence of the constitutional doctrine. The doctrine resides in the text, structure, original public meaning and historical development of the Constitution itself, via Article VI and the First Amendment's Religion Clauses. This ancient Biblical doctrine, rooted in the testimony of Christ Himself, and His apostles, is informed by long-standing jurisprudence recognising that liberty is best preserved when civil and ecclesiastical authority remain institutionally distinct so as to protect religion from governmental control while protecting civil government from ecclesiastical establishment.

I respectfully request that the Commission should therefore distinguish between two very different propositions:

1. the incorrect proposition that 'separation of church and state' requires the exclusion of private religious expression from public life; and

2. the correct and historically orthodox proposition that 'separation of church and state' requires civil government to not establish, direct or finance religion or coerce observance of religion, or surrender governmental authority to religious institutions.

The former proposition should be rejected. The latter should be preserved.
I base my principal submission and the above distinction on the following historical antecedents and jurisprudential proofs which underpin my ten recommendations to the Commission that I have provided at the conclusion of this submission.

1. Christ's Distinction Between God and Caesar

Because the Draft Report grounds much of its account of American freedom in Christianity, the constitutional discussion should begin with Christ's own teaching:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."[3]

This proclamation was not a repudiation of civil government. Christ recognised Caesar's legitimate civil jurisdiction. But He simultaneously denied Caesar unlimited jurisdiction by distinguishing those obligations belonging to civil society from those belonging to God.

The Apostles developed the same framework. Romans 13:1–10 describes civil authority as ordained by God to restrain wrongdoing, preserve civil order and administer justice.[4] Yet civil authority remains limited. When religious obligation and governmental command irreconcilably conflict, the apostolic rule is: "We ought to obey God rather than men."[5]

The New Testament therefore establishes neither governmental atheism nor an ecclesiastical state. It recognises **distinct jurisdictions**:

- government possesses legitimate authority over civil order;
- God possesses ultimate authority over worship and conscience;
- religious faith cannot authentically be created by force;

- civil rulers are not authorised to determine doctrine or compel worship.

That biblical distinction provides the foundational normative principle within the Christian constitutional tradition. Sir Edward Coke's defence of limited civil power, Roger Williams' protection of liberty of conscience, the Baptist struggle against religious establishments, Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*, Jefferson's Virginia Statute and the First Amendment developed within a broader historical environment; but, from the Christian perspective invoked by the Commission itself, Christ's separation of the things of Caesar from the things of God remains the root principle by which later developments should be evaluated.
A claim that Christianity requires institutional fusion between church and state cannot readily be reconciled with Christ's own jurisdictional distinction. Nor can civil promotion of Christianity excuse governmental authority over the conscience. Christianity teaches voluntary faith, not worship manufactured by public power.

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2. Separation Is a Constitutional Doctrine, Not Merely a Phrase

The Commission correctly observes that the expression "separation of church and state" is not written verbatim in the Constitution. That observation, however, does not determine the constitutional issue.
The Constitution does not expressly use the phrase "separation of powers". Yet the distribution of legislative, executive and judicial power across Articles I, II and III creates that constitutional doctrine.[6] Nor does the Constitution expressly use the expression "judicial review"; nevertheless, the doctrine follows from the judicial power, constitutional supremacy and the judicial duty to apply law.[7]

Constitutional doctrines frequently arise from the combined operation of text, structure and history. Church–state separation is similarly embodied in:

- Article VI's prohibition upon religious tests for federal office;
- the Establishment Clause;
- the Free Exercise Clause;
- the absence of federal ecclesiastical jurisdiction;
- and the Constitution's general creation of a government of limited, enumerated civil powers.[8]

The First Amendment declares that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof".[9] These are complementary guarantees. Non-establishment prevents government from controlling or privileging religion as an institution of state. Free exercise protects persons and communities in practising religion without discriminatory governmental interference.
The resulting constitutional settlement is neither hostility nor theocracy. It is **religious liberty through jurisdictional separation**.

The Commission itself acknowledges that government may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance.[10] Those concessions necessarily recognise a constitutional boundary separating governmental and ecclesiastical authority. The real dispute is therefore not whether any separation exists, but the nature and extent of that separation.
The Report should say so expressly.

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3. Roger Williams, the Baptists and Liberty of Conscience

The constitutional tradition did not begin with twentieth-century Supreme Court jurisprudence.
Sir Edward Coke helped establish that the monarch was subject to law, could not personally decide legal controversies and could not alter the law through mere proclamation.[11] This developing separation and limitation of institutional power became foundational to Anglo-American constitutionalism.
Roger Williams was connected in his youth with Coke's household and benefited from Coke's patronage and intellectual environment, although the precise description and duration of Williams' role as Coke's scribe or secretary should not be overstated.[12] Williams later applied the principle of limited jurisdiction specifically to religion.

Williams defended a “hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world”.[13] He did not seek to suppress Christianity. He sought to protect the church from corruption and conscience from coercion. His Rhode Island experiment demonstrated that strong religious faith and the absence of an established church were not opposites.

Isaac Backus and John Leland continued this Baptist tradition. Baptists knew from experience that governmental support for “religion” commonly meant governmental preference for somebody else’s religion. They opposed religious assessments and establishments not because they undervalued faith, but because they believed Christ alone was Lord of the conscience.[14]

This history is indispensable. Jefferson’s later metaphor did not create church–state separation. It described a principle already developed through Christian and Baptist arguments for voluntary religion, institutional independence and liberty of conscience.

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4. Madison, Jefferson and the First Amendment

James Madison’s *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* opposed Patrick Henry’s proposal for governmental support of Christian teachers. Madison commenced with religious duty, not secular hostility:

“The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man.”[15]
He reasoned that religion can be directed only by “reason and conviction, not by force or violence”, and that duties owed to the Creator precede the claims of civil society.[16] Governmental religious assessment was therefore objectionable even when the beneficiaries were Christian.

Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom similarly declared that “Almighty God hath created the mind free” and rejected civil penalties, taxation and disabilities imposed to influence religious belief.[17] Jefferson regarded the statute as sufficiently important to be identified on his memorial alongside the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the University of Virginia.

The Danbury Baptist Association wrote to Jefferson in 1801 from a state in which Congregational establishment remained. The Baptists’ concern was not that religion enjoyed too little governmental power; it was that religious liberty remained vulnerable when treated as a governmental favour rather than an inalienable right.[18]

Jefferson replied in 1802 that the First Amendment had built “a wall of separation between Church & State”.[19] That letter is not constitutional text and should not be treated as though it were. But neither should it be dismissed as a twentieth-century invention. It is founding-generation evidence from the author of the Virginia Statute, written to a religious minority about the practical meaning of the Religion Clauses.

The Supreme Court relied upon Jefferson’s explanation in *Reynolds v United States* in 1879—not first in the mid-twentieth century—and described it as an authoritative declaration of the amendment’s scope and effect.[20] The metaphor was therefore part of nineteenth-century constitutional jurisprudence long before *Everson v Board of Education*.

The strongest originalist conclusion is not that the First Amendment banished religion from public life. It plainly did not. Religious citizens retained freedom of speech, free exercise, association and political participation. The conclusion is that federal civil power was denied ecclesiastical jurisdiction: it could not establish a national church, coerce religious observance, control doctrine or condition federal office upon religious profession.

That is constitutional separation.

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5. The Seventh-day Adventist Experience in the United States

The Seventh-day Adventist experience illustrates why this boundary matters.
Senator Henry W Blair’s 1888 Sunday Rest Bill proposed to secure observance of the first day of the week “as a day of rest” and promote its observance “as a day of religious worship”.[21] Seventh-day Adventists observed the seventh-day Sabbath and understood that an ostensibly general Christian measure could burden minority Christians whose conscience differed from the religious majority.

Alonzo T Jones appeared before the United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor in opposition to the Bill. Adventists did not ask government to recognise Saturday instead of Sunday. They opposed governmental selection and enforcement of either day as religious observance. Their constitutional principle was equality of conscience, not denominational preference.

Ellen G White warned in *The Great Controversy* that when churches obtain civil power to enforce religious observance, religious liberty becomes endangered. She wrote that predictions that "church and state would unite to persecute those who keep the commandments of God" had been dismissed, but that agitation for enforced Sunday observance disclosed the continuing risk.[22]

The Commission need not accept Adventist eschatology to appreciate the constitutional warning. A religious majority that welcomes governmental power when it serves its present convictions may later find that same power controlled by another majority. Institutional separation protects every faith because it denies government the jurisdiction to determine religious truth.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I therefore support the Commission's defence of voluntary religious expression, accommodation and equal participation. But for the same religious reasons, I oppose governmental machinery that may transform majority theology into civil obligation.

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6. The Australian Constitutional Parallel

Australia's constitutional history provides an instructive comparison.

During the movement toward Federation, Australian churches campaigned for recognition of God in the Constitution. Patrick Glynn successfully proposed language in the Preamble declaring that the people were "humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God".[23]

Australian Seventh-day Adventists feared that constitutional recognition could later be used to imply Commonwealth authority to enact religious observance laws, particularly Sunday laws. Ellen White lived in Australia between 1891 and 1900, while Adventists circulated petitions and publications opposing unqualified constitutional religious recognition.

Victorian delegate Henry Bournes Higgins responded to the concern by advocating "proper safeguards". He objected to giving the Commonwealth "a tyrannous and overriding power over Australians as to what day they shall observe for religious reasons", adding that "religious observance is no good if it is enforced by law".[24]

His amendment became s 116:

"The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth."[25]

The Australian provision was influenced by the United States Constitution but expressly added a prohibition upon laws "for imposing any religious observance". Australia's constitutional founders did not regard religious recognition and religious liberty as self-executingly harmonious. They recognised that constitutional acknowledgment of God required countervailing restraints upon governmental power.
My Honours research argues that the Recognition campaign and the campaign for "proper safeguards" were opposing but interconnected forces in the framing of the Constitution: the former placed religious language in the Preamble; the latter secured s 116 to withhold Commonwealth power over religious establishment, observance, free exercise and tests.[26]

This comparative history reinforces the American lesson: constitutional separation is not anti-Christian. It may be demanded by Christians seeking to prevent government from intruding upon the things belonging to God.

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7. Government Funding and the Johnson Amendment

The Commission recommends equal access by faith-based institutions to generally available public funding.[27] The constitutional objection should be stated carefully.

Religious organisations should not be excluded from neutral public programs merely because of their religious identity where funding supports a generally available secular benefit and participation does not establish governmental control. Recent Supreme Court jurisprudence strongly protects against discriminatory exclusion of religious participants.[28]

However, equal participation in a neutral benefit is not identical to direct governmental funding of worship, proselytism or inherently religious activity. Public money entails public accountability, conditions, audits and political allocation. The more directly government funds religious activity as such, the greater the risk that government will define eligible religion, distinguish acceptable from unacceptable doctrine, and create financial dependence between religious institutions and political officeholders.

The Commission should preserve this distinction rather than describe all resistance to governmental religious funding as hostility toward faith.

The Johnson Amendment also requires nuance. Religious leaders must remain free to teach the moral implications of Scripture, criticise public policy and address questions of justice without intimidation. Yet repeal would permit tax-exempt churches to become institutional campaign participants while retaining publicly subsidised status.[29]

Partisan endorsement is different from religious teaching. Churches that become electoral instruments risk exchanging spiritual independence for political access. Political parties may then reward supportive churches and marginalise dissenting ones. The Commission should recommend narrow and clear protection for issue-based preaching, rather than complete repeal without adequate safeguards against the conversion of houses of worship into tax-advantaged political organisations.

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8. Recommendations

In light of my submission, I respectfully recommend the Commission do the following:

1. **withdraw or revise any categorical statement that the Constitution contains no separation of church and state;**
2. state instead that constitutional separation does **not** require exclusion of private religious voices from public life, but does require institutional limits upon governmental establishment, coercion and control of religion;
3. recognise Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1–10 and Acts 5:29 as establishing legitimate but limited civil authority and the primacy of obedience to God in matters of conscience;
4. include the Baptist contribution of Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland and the Danbury Baptist Association in its history;
5. engage fully with Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*, Jefferson's Virginia Statute and the original historical function of the Religion Clauses;
6. recognise the experience of religious minorities, including Seventh-day Adventists opposing the Blair Sunday Bill;
7. distinguish neutral access to generally available benefits from governmental funding of inherently religious worship and activity;
8. retain safeguards against the partisan capture of tax-exempt churches, while clarifying that religious leaders may preach freely upon moral and public questions;
9. remove the "bridge" analogy where it implies institutional partnership or mutual support between church and state, and instead describe a constitutional boundary that permits cooperation for legitimate secular purposes without establishment or ecclesiastical control; and

10. reaffirm that religious liberty belongs equally to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, members of every other faith, and persons of no religious faith.

Conclusion

The Commission is right that separation of church and state must not be distorted into a rule silencing religious citizens or excluding faith from public discussion. Religious believers retain the same constitutional freedoms of speech, association, petition and civic participation as everyone else.

But it does not follow that constitutional separation is a myth.

The constitutional text separates governmental establishment from religious exercise. Article VI rejects religious tests. Madison defended conscience against religious assessments. Jefferson's "wall" described—not created—the constitutional boundary. Baptists demanded it because they were believers. Seventh-day Adventists defended it because they feared that majority Christianity might compel minority Christians to violate conscience. Australia's founders drew from the American model and added an express prohibition upon imposed religious observance.

The Commission's error is therefore not its defence of religion in public life. That defence is commendable. Its error is treating the misuse of separation as proof that separation itself lacks constitutional existence.

Christ's command remains the sounder constitutional guide:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

The wall rightly understood does not imprison religion. It restrains Caesar.

It protects the church from political control, protects government from ecclesiastical capture, and protects every human conscience from coercion. I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve it.

Respectfully submitted,



Mr. William Pitt Esq.

B.Comm./M.Fin (1st Class Hons.), LLB (1st Class Hons.)

Lawyer | Lecturer in Constitutional Law | PhD Candidate (Law)
Victoria, Australia; for and on behalf of my adopted-mother in Arkansas, USA

ENDNOTES

[1] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, *America's First Freedom: Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission* (Draft Report, June 2026) 20–21, 41–44, 189–91 ('Draft Report').
[2] Ibid 13, 22, 127–28, 200, 203, 212–19.
[3] Matthew 22:21 (King James Version); see also Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25.
[4] Romans 13:1–10 (King James Version).
[5] Acts 5:29 (King James Version).
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END of SUBMISSION.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019983

William Pitt



William PITT

PUBLIC COMMENT TO THE PRESIDENTIAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION:

Religious Liberty, the First Amendment and Constitutional Separation of Church and State

A Comparative Originalist Submission from an Australian/American Seventh-day Adventist and Constitutional Law Academic

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Dear Chairman Patrick and Members
of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

RE: PUBLIC COMMENT – CHAPTERS 1, 2, 8 AND 14: SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE – Mr. WILLIAM PITT Esq.

I respectfully submit this public comment concerning the Commission's June 2026 Draft Report, *America's First Freedom*.

Firstly, I wish to commend the Commission for affirming religious liberty as an indispensable human and constitutional freedom; defending the rights of religious believers to participate fully in public life; protecting freedom of conscience; and recognising the social contributions made by churches, religious schools, charities and faith-based institutions. Religious citizens must not be silenced, excluded from public benefits merely because they are religious, or compelled to abandon sincerely held beliefs as the price of participating in civil society.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019985

Nevertheless, I respectfully object to the Draft Report's treatment of the constitutional separation of church and state. The Report states that the phrase "wall of separation between church and state" does not appear in the First Amendment, suggests that the idea gained prominence only in the mid-twentieth century, and recommends replacing the metaphorical "wall" with a "bridge" between religion and the state.[1] It also recommends repeal of the Johnson Amendment and expanded governmental partnerships and funding involving religious institutions.[2] The Report's account is more nuanced than the blunt proposition that religious expression must be excluded from public life; indeed, it correctly rejects that proposition. But its broader dismissal of constitutional church–state separation mistakes misuse of the doctrine for non-existence of the doctrine itself. (Department of Justice)

I write as a lawyer, lecturer in Constitutional Law and PhD candidate undertaking comparative legal research into constitutional religious liberty and church–state separation under the United States and Australian Constitutions. I am a Seventh-day Adventist and have family residing in the United States, including my adopted mother and have residence in the USA. I therefore make this submission both in my own professional academic capacity and also as a person whose family, faith and research are directly affected by the continuing strength and ongoing influence of American religious-liberty protections.

My principal submission to the Commission is:

Constitutional 'separation of church and state' is not an isolated metaphor nor a modern judicial invention. The absence of the precise words 'separation of church and state' from the constitutional text does not establish any absence of the constitutional doctrine. The doctrine resides in the text, structure, original public meaning and historical development of the Constitution itself, via Article VI and the First Amendment's Religion Clauses. This ancient Biblical doctrine, rooted in the testimony of Christ Himself, and His apostles, is informed by long-standing jurisprudence recognising that liberty is best preserved when civil and ecclesiastical authority remain institutionally distinct so as to protect religion from governmental control while protecting civil government from ecclesiastical establishment.

I respectfully request that the Commission should therefore distinguish between two very different propositions:

1. the incorrect proposition that 'separation of church and state' requires the exclusion of private religious expression from public life; and
2. the correct and historically orthodox proposition that 'separation of church and state' requires civil government to not establish, direct or finance religion or coerce observance of religion, or surrender governmental authority to religious institutions.

The former proposition should be rejected. The latter should be preserved.

I base my principal submission and the above distinction on the following historical antecedents and jurisprudential proofs which underpin my ten recommendations to the Commission that I have provided at the conclusion of this submission.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019986

1. Christ's Distinction Between God and Caesar

Because the Draft Report grounds much of its account of American freedom in Christianity, the constitutional discussion should begin with Christ's own teaching:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."[3]

This proclamation was not a repudiation of civil government. Christ recognised Caesar's legitimate civil jurisdiction. But He simultaneously denied Caesar unlimited jurisdiction by distinguishing those obligations belonging to civil society from those belonging to God.

The Apostles developed the same framework. Romans 13:1–10 describes civil authority as ordained by God to restrain wrongdoing, preserve civil order and administer justice.[4] Yet civil authority remains limited. When religious obligation and governmental command irreconcilably conflict, the apostolic rule is: "We ought to obey God rather than men."[5]

The New Testament therefore establishes neither governmental atheism nor an ecclesiastical state. It recognises **distinct jurisdictions**:

- government possesses legitimate authority over civil order;
- God possesses ultimate authority over worship and conscience;
- religious faith cannot authentically be created by force;
- civil rulers are not authorised to determine doctrine or compel worship.

That biblical distinction provides the foundational normative principle within the Christian constitutional tradition. Sir Edward Coke's defence of limited civil power, Roger Williams' protection of liberty of conscience, the Baptist struggle against religious establishments, Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*, Jefferson's Virginia Statute and the First Amendment developed within a broader historical environment; but, from the Christian perspective invoked by the Commission itself, Christ's separation of the things of Caesar from the things of God remains the root principle by which later developments should be evaluated.

A claim that Christianity requires institutional fusion between church and state cannot readily be reconciled with Christ's own jurisdictional distinction. Nor can civil promotion of Christianity excuse governmental authority over the conscience. Christianity teaches voluntary faith, not worship manufactured by public power.

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2. Separation Is a Constitutional Doctrine, Not Merely a Phrase

The Commission correctly observes that the expression "separation of church and state" is not written verbatim in the Constitution. That observation, however, does not determine the constitutional issue.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019987

The Constitution does not expressly use the phrase “separation of powers”. Yet the distribution of legislative, executive and judicial power across Articles I, II and III creates that constitutional doctrine.[6] Nor does the Constitution expressly use the expression “judicial review”; nevertheless, the doctrine follows from the judicial power, constitutional supremacy and the judicial duty to apply law.[7]

Constitutional doctrines frequently arise from the combined operation of text, structure and history. Church–state separation is similarly embodied in:

- Article VI’s prohibition upon religious tests for federal office;
- the Establishment Clause;
- the Free Exercise Clause;
- the absence of federal ecclesiastical jurisdiction;
- and the Constitution’s general creation of a government of limited, enumerated civil powers.[8]

The First Amendment declares that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof”.[9] These are complementary guarantees. Non-establishment prevents government from controlling or privileging religion as an institution of state. Free exercise protects persons and communities in practising religion without discriminatory governmental interference.

The resulting constitutional settlement is neither hostility nor theocracy. It is **religious liberty through jurisdictional separation**.

The Commission itself acknowledges that government may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance.[10] Those concessions necessarily recognise a constitutional boundary separating governmental and ecclesiastical authority. The real dispute is therefore not whether any separation exists, but the nature and extent of that separation.

The Report should say so expressly.

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3. Roger Williams, the Baptists and Liberty of Conscience

The constitutional tradition did not begin with twentieth-century Supreme Court jurisprudence.

Sir Edward Coke helped establish that the monarch was subject to law, could not personally decide legal controversies and could not alter the law through mere proclamation.[11] This developing separation and limitation of institutional power became foundational to Anglo-American constitutionalism.

Roger Williams was connected in his youth with Coke’s household and benefited from Coke’s patronage and intellectual environment, although the precise description and

DOJ-RLC Comment-019988

duration of Williams' role as Coke's scribe or secretary should not be overstated.[12] Williams later applied the principle of limited jurisdiction specifically to religion.

Williams defended a "hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world".[13] He did not seek to suppress Christianity. He sought to protect the church from corruption and conscience from coercion. His Rhode Island experiment demonstrated that strong religious faith and the absence of an established church were not opposites.

Isaac Backus and John Leland continued this Baptist tradition. Baptists knew from experience that governmental support for "religion" commonly meant governmental preference for somebody else's religion. They opposed religious assessments and establishments not because they undervalued faith, but because they believed Christ alone was Lord of the conscience.[14]

This history is indispensable. Jefferson's later metaphor did not create church–state separation. It described a principle already developed through Christian and Baptist arguments for voluntary religion, institutional independence and liberty of conscience.

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4. Madison, Jefferson and the First Amendment

James Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* opposed Patrick Henry's proposal for governmental support of Christian teachers. Madison commenced with religious duty, not secular hostility:

"The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man."[15]

He reasoned that religion can be directed only by "reason and conviction, not by force or violence", and that duties owed to the Creator precede the claims of civil society.[16] Governmental religious assessment was therefore objectionable even when the beneficiaries were Christian.

Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom similarly declared that "Almighty God hath created the mind free" and rejected civil penalties, taxation and disabilities imposed to influence religious belief.[17] Jefferson regarded the statute as sufficiently important to be identified on his memorial alongside the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the University of Virginia.

The Danbury Baptist Association wrote to Jefferson in 1801 from a state in which Congregational establishment remained. The Baptists' concern was not that religion enjoyed too little governmental power; it was that religious liberty remained vulnerable when treated as a governmental favour rather than an inalienable right.[18]

DOJ-RLC Comment-019989

Jefferson replied in 1802 that the First Amendment had built "a wall of separation between Church & State".[19] That letter is not constitutional text and should not be treated as though it were. But neither should it be dismissed as a twentieth-century invention. It is founding-generation evidence from the author of the Virginia Statute, written to a religious minority about the practical meaning of the Religion Clauses.

The Supreme Court relied upon Jefferson's explanation in *Reynolds v United States* in 1879—not first in the mid-twentieth century—and described it as an authoritative declaration of the amendment's scope and effect.[20] The metaphor was therefore part of nineteenth-century constitutional jurisprudence long before *Everson v Board of Education*.

The strongest originalist conclusion is not that the First Amendment banished religion from public life. It plainly did not. Religious citizens retained freedom of speech, free exercise, association and political participation. The conclusion is that federal civil power was denied ecclesiastical jurisdiction: it could not establish a national church, coerce religious observance, control doctrine or condition federal office upon religious profession.

That is constitutional separation.

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5. The Seventh-day Adventist Experience in the United States

The Seventh-day Adventist experience illustrates why this boundary matters.

Senator Henry W Blair's 1888 Sunday Rest Bill proposed to secure observance of the first day of the week "as a day of rest" and promote its observance "as a day of religious worship".[21] Seventh-day Adventists observed the seventh-day Sabbath and understood that an ostensibly general Christian measure could burden minority Christians whose conscience differed from the religious majority.

Alonzo T Jones appeared before the United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor in opposition to the Bill. Adventists did not ask government to recognise Saturday instead of Sunday. They opposed governmental selection and enforcement of either day as religious observance. Their constitutional principle was equality of conscience, not denominational preference.

Ellen G White warned in *The Great Controversy* that when churches obtain civil power to enforce religious observance, religious liberty becomes endangered. She wrote that predictions that "church and state would unite to persecute those who keep the commandments of God" had been dismissed, but that agitation for enforced Sunday observance disclosed the continuing risk.[22]

The Commission need not accept Adventist eschatology to appreciate the constitutional warning. A religious majority that welcomes governmental power when it serves its present convictions may later find that same power controlled by another majority. Institutional

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separation protects every faith because it denies government the jurisdiction to determine religious truth.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I therefore support the Commission's defence of voluntary religious expression, accommodation and equal participation. But for the same religious reasons, I oppose governmental machinery that may transform majority theology into civil obligation.

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6. The Australian Constitutional Parallel

Australia's constitutional history provides an instructive comparison.

During the movement toward Federation, Australian churches campaigned for recognition of God in the Constitution. Patrick Glynn successfully proposed language in the Preamble declaring that the people were "humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God".[23]

Australian Seventh-day Adventists feared that constitutional recognition could later be used to imply Commonwealth authority to enact religious observance laws, particularly Sunday laws. Ellen White lived in Australia between 1891 and 1900, while Adventists circulated petitions and publications opposing unqualified constitutional religious recognition.

Victorian delegate Henry Bournes Higgins responded to the concern by advocating "proper safeguards". He objected to giving the Commonwealth "a tyrannous and overriding power over Australians as to what day they shall observe for religious reasons", adding that "religious observance is no good if it is enforced by law".[24]

His amendment became s 116:

"The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth."[25]

The Australian provision was influenced by the United States Constitution but expressly added a prohibition upon laws "for imposing any religious observance". Australia's constitutional founders did not regard religious recognition and religious liberty as self-executingly harmonious. They recognised that constitutional acknowledgment of God required countervailing restraints upon governmental power.

My Honours research argues that the Recognition campaign and the campaign for "proper safeguards" were opposing but interconnected forces in the framing of the Constitution: the former placed religious language in the Preamble; the latter secured s 116 to withhold Commonwealth power over religious establishment, observance, free exercise and tests.[26]

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This comparative history reinforces the American lesson: constitutional separation is not anti-Christian. It may be demanded by Christians seeking to prevent government from intruding upon the things belonging to God.

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7. Government Funding and the Johnson Amendment

The Commission recommends equal access by faith-based institutions to generally available public funding.[27] The constitutional objection should be stated carefully.

Religious organisations should not be excluded from neutral public programs merely because of their religious identity where funding supports a generally available secular benefit and participation does not establish governmental control. Recent Supreme Court jurisprudence strongly protects against discriminatory exclusion of religious participants.[28]

However, equal participation in a neutral benefit is not identical to direct governmental funding of worship, proselytism or inherently religious activity. Public money entails public accountability, conditions, audits and political allocation. The more directly government funds religious activity as such, the greater the risk that government will define eligible religion, distinguish acceptable from unacceptable doctrine, and create financial dependence between religious institutions and political officeholders.

The Commission should preserve this distinction rather than describe all resistance to governmental religious funding as hostility toward faith.

The Johnson Amendment also requires nuance. Religious leaders must remain free to teach the moral implications of Scripture, criticise public policy and address questions of justice without intimidation. Yet repeal would permit tax-exempt churches to become institutional campaign participants while retaining publicly subsidised status.[29]

Partisan endorsement is different from religious teaching. Churches that become electoral instruments risk exchanging spiritual independence for political access. Political parties may then reward supportive churches and marginalise dissenting ones. The Commission should recommend narrow and clear protection for issue-based preaching, rather than complete repeal without adequate safeguards against the conversion of houses of worship into tax-advantaged political organisations.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019992

8. Recommendations

In light of my submission, I respectfully recommend the Commission do the following:

1. **withdraw or revise any categorical statement that the Constitution contains no separation of church and state;**

2. state instead that constitutional separation does **not** require exclusion of private religious voices from public life, but does require institutional limits upon governmental establishment, coercion and control of religion;

3. recognise Matthew 22:21, Romans 13:1–10 and Acts 5:29 as establishing legitimate but limited civil authority and the primacy of obedience to God in matters of conscience;

4. include the Baptist contribution of Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland and the Danbury Baptist Association in its history;

5. engage fully with Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*, Jefferson's Virginia Statute and the original historical function of the Religion Clauses;

6. recognise the experience of religious minorities, including Seventh-day Adventists opposing the Blair Sunday Bill;

7. distinguish neutral access to generally available benefits from governmental funding of inherently religious worship and activity;

8. retain safeguards against the partisan capture of tax-exempt churches, while clarifying that religious leaders may preach freely upon moral and public questions;

9. remove the "bridge" analogy where it implies institutional partnership or mutual support between church and state, and instead describe a constitutional boundary that permits cooperation for legitimate secular purposes without establishment or ecclesiastical control; and

10. reaffirm that religious liberty belongs equally to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, members of every other faith, and persons of no religious faith.

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Conclusion

The Commission is right that separation of church and state must not be distorted into a rule silencing religious citizens or excluding faith from public discussion. Religious believers retain the same constitutional freedoms of speech, association, petition and civic participation as everyone else.

But it does not follow that constitutional separation is a myth.

The constitutional text separates governmental establishment from religious exercise. Article VI rejects religious tests. Madison defended conscience against religious assessments. Jefferson's "wall" described—not created—the constitutional boundary. Baptists demanded it because they were believers. Seventh-day Adventists defended it because they feared that majority Christianity might compel minority Christians to violate conscience. Australia's founders drew from the American model and added an express prohibition upon imposed religious observance.

The Commission's error is therefore not its defence of religion in public life. That defence is commendable. Its error is treating the misuse of separation as proof that separation itself lacks constitutional existence.

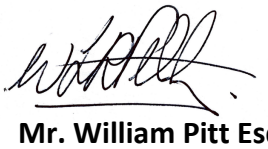
Christ's command remains the sounder constitutional guide:

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

The wall rightly understood does not imprison religion. It restrains Caesar.

It protects the church from political control, protects government from ecclesiastical capture, and protects every human conscience from coercion. I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve it.

Respectfully submitted,



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A Bill to Secure to the People the Enjoyment of the First Day of the Week, Commonly Known as the Lord's Day, as a Day of Rest, and to Promote Its Observance as a Day of Religious Worship, S 2983, 50th Congress (1888)

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G. Other

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Williams, Roger, *Mr Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644)

END of SUBMISSION.

DOJ-RLC Comment-019998

From: hannah perez <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State- Hannah Perez
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 14:05:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
It is imperative that we must keep the separation of church and state. It is not unconstitutional or un-American. If we bring them together, the government would then control what churches do and bring a national Sunday law. As a Seventh-day Adventist, I feel that it is my duty, along with others, to stop this before it is too late. I even wrote a letter to President Trump to be careful about who he listens to and not to become a King Nebuchadnezzar, for it appears he is going down that path. No matter the outcome of this, prophecy has stated that this will happen and that we all must prepare and not to fall for the mark of the beast. I pray that you will listen to the voice of the people. The United States is a place of freedom, including freedom of religion. Please think and pray about what you are doing.
Sincerely,
Hannah Perez
Columbia, MD
P.S.
Read the book of Daniel and Revelation. For it talks about prophecy and what is to come for this world in the end times.
Matthew 16:26

From: Rachel Cox <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separate church and state. I want my freedom
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 14:10:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I was upset 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 Seventh Day Adventist Christian, 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. 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. It protects me.
Sincerely,
Rachel Cox
Gladstone, MO
_____-

From: Ani <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment separation of church and state
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 14:37:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

I along with my church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not support the Religious Liberty Commission's recent declaration that there is no separation between church and state.

Our co-founder Ellen White said:

“Let not the commandment-keeping people of God be silent at this time as though we gracefully accepted the situation." — The S.D.A. Bible Commentary 7:975 (1889).

"We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. Fervent, effectual prayer should be ascending to heaven that this calamity may be deferred until we can accomplish the work which has so long been neglected. Let there be most earnest prayer and then let us work in harmony with our prayers." —Testimonies for the Church 5:714 (1889).

"We cannot labor to please men who will use their influence to repress religious liberty...The people of God are not to vote to place such men in office, for when they do this they are partakers with them of the sins which they commit while in office." — Fundamentals of Christian Education, 475 (1899).

Respectfully,

Ina Renee Ward
[redacted]

From: mel val <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support for Religious Liberty and the Constitutional Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 14:38:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Coordination Office,

I am writing as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian to express my appreciation for the constitutional protections that preserve religious liberty in the United States and to respectfully encourage the continued defense of the separation of church and state. This principle has protected Americans of every faith for more than two centuries and remains one of the greatest safeguards of freedom of conscience.

The First Amendment wisely prohibits the establishment of religion while protecting every individual's free exercise of religion. These two protections work together to ensure that no church receives governmental preference and no citizen is compelled by the state to accept or reject a particular religious belief.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe that faith is meaningful only when it is freely chosen. God never forces worship. Throughout Scripture, He appeals to the conscience rather than compelling obedience through civil authority. Moses declared, "I have set before you life and death… therefore choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Joshua challenged Israel, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Jesus taught, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21), recognizing a distinction between the responsibilities of civil government and the obligations owed to God.

Likewise, when earthly authorities attempted to prevent the apostles from preaching the Gospel, they responded, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). The Apostle Paul reminded believers that civil governments exist to maintain civil order and punish wrongdoing (Romans 13:1–7), not to compel religious belief or determine matters of conscience. Scripture also teaches, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17), and "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free" (Galatians 5:1). These passages affirm that genuine faith cannot be produced by governmental power.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has consistently defended religious liberty for everyone, regardless of religious affiliation. Our commitment extends not only to Adventists but to Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, atheists, agnostics, and every other person. Freedom of conscience is a God-given right that belongs equally to all people.

History repeatedly demonstrates why this constitutional protection is essential.

When church and state became closely united during portions of the Middle Ages, religious minorities—including the Waldenses and other dissenting Christians—experienced persecution for following their convictions rather than the teachings of the established church.

During the Protestant Reformation, although many reformers sought religious freedom for themselves, governments aligned with both Protestant and Catholic churches sometimes persecuted Christians whose beliefs differed from the officially recognized faith. Anabaptists were imprisoned and executed because they rejected infant baptism and believed baptism should follow a personal profession of faith.

In colonial America, Baptists, Quakers, and other minority denominations were fined, imprisoned, or prevented from freely practicing their religion because several colonies maintained established churches supported by civil government. Roger Williams and others recognized that civil authority should not control religious belief and became early advocates for complete religious liberty.

These historical examples demonstrate that persecution is not simply one religion oppressing another. Christians have at times persecuted fellow Christians when government favored one denomination over another. Whenever the state gives preference to one religious tradition, the liberty of every other religious community becomes vulnerable.

This lesson remains relevant today. Regardless of which denomination may hold political influence at any given time, governmental authority should never be used to compel worship, enforce religious observance, or penalize sincerely held religious convictions. Such actions undermine both constitutional liberty and biblical principles.

This conviction has long been reflected in the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. One of our founders, Ellen G. White, repeatedly warned that history demonstrates the dangers that arise whenever religious institutions rely upon civil authority to accomplish spiritual objectives. She emphasized that truth should be advanced through Scripture, education, persuasion, compassion, and the work of the Holy Spirit—not through legislation or coercion.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church also maintains an official ministry dedicated to religious liberty and has consistently supported constitutional protections that guarantee freedom of conscience for people of every faith. This commitment reflects our belief that government best fulfills its purpose when it protects civil rights equally without favoring one religion or denomination over another.

Our understanding of biblical prophecy further reinforces this conviction. Seventh-day Adventists interpret Revelation 13 as describing a future period in which civil authority becomes intertwined with religious power, resulting in pressure upon conscience and

restrictions on religious freedom. While Christians differ in their interpretations of prophecy, our church has consistently affirmed that worship acceptable to God can never be compelled by civil law. Matters of conscience belong to God alone.

The separation of church and state protects every Christian denomination equally. It safeguards the Baptist's right to be Baptist, the Catholic's right to be Catholic, the Lutheran's right to be Lutheran, the Methodist's right to be Methodist, the Pentecostal's right to be Pentecostal, and the Seventh-day Adventist's right to observe the seventh-day Sabbath according to biblical conviction. It equally protects those who hold different religious beliefs or no religious beliefs at all.

The genius of the American constitutional system is that it allows religious diversity to flourish peacefully without government deciding which theological interpretation is correct. By remaining neutral in matters of religion, the government protects the liberty of every citizen while allowing faith communities to carry out their missions through conviction rather than coercion.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage the Department of Justice to continue defending the constitutional protections embodied in the First Amendment. Preserving the separation of church and state protects every American's freedom of conscience and helps ensure that future generations will continue to enjoy the liberty to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your continued commitment to protecting one of our nation's most precious constitutional freedoms.

Respectfully,

Melquisedec Valera

Copy That

From: mel val <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] The Importance of the Separation of Church and State and the Protection of Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 14:40:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Coordination Office,

I am writing as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian to express my deep appreciation for the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state and to encourage its continued protection as one of the greatest safeguards of religious liberty in the United States.

The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and prevents the establishment of a national religion. These protections allow every American to worship God according to the dictates of conscience without fear of government coercion or religious discrimination.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe that faith must always be voluntary. God desires willing obedience that comes from love and conviction, not from civil force. Jesus Himself recognized the distinction between civil authority and religious obligation when He said, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). Likewise, the apostles declared, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29), affirming that conscience ultimately belongs to God.

Throughout history, whenever governments have united with religious institutions, the result has too often been the suppression of religious freedom.

History provides sobering examples:

- During the Middle Ages, religious minorities such as the Waldenses faced persecution because they rejected the authority of the established church.
- During the Protestant Reformation, both Catholic and Protestant governments at various times persecuted Christians whose beliefs differed from the officially recognized faith. Anabaptists were imprisoned and executed because they rejected infant baptism and advocated religious liberty.
- In colonial America, Baptists, Quakers, and other minority denominations were fined, jailed, or denied civil rights because they did not conform to the established churches supported by the government.
- Even within Christianity, denominations have sometimes used political influence to restrict fellow Christians over differences involving baptism, worship practices, church authority, or the observance of the Sabbath.

These examples demonstrate that religious persecution is not limited to conflicts between different religions. History shows that Christians have also persecuted other Christians when government favored one denomination over another. This serves as a reminder that no denomination should possess governmental authority over matters of faith.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has consistently defended religious liberty for everyone—not only for Adventists. We believe that Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox Christians, Evangelicals, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, and people of every faith or no faith should enjoy equal protection under the law. Religious liberty is a universal human right because freedom of conscience is a gift from God.

This conviction has long been part of Seventh-day Adventist teaching. One of our founders, Ellen G. White, repeatedly warned that the union of church and state has historically resulted in oppression rather than genuine faith. She taught that religion flourishes best when it depends upon persuasion, Scripture, and personal conviction instead of governmental authority.

Seventh-day Adventists also understand the prophecies of Revelation 13 as warning against the misuse of civil power to enforce religious observance. While Christians may differ in their interpretation of prophecy, our church has consistently upheld the principle that worship must never be compelled by law. The role of government is to protect the civil rights of its citizens, while the role of the church is to proclaim the Gospel through love, service, and persuasion.

The separation of church and state protects every Christian denomination equally. It safeguards the Baptist's right to be Baptist, the Catholic's right to be Catholic, the Methodist's right to be Methodist, the Seventh-day Adventist's right to observe the biblical Sabbath, and the rights of every other citizen to worship according to conscience. It prevents the majority from imposing its religious convictions upon the minority and preserves peace among people of differing beliefs.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage the Department of Justice to continue defending the constitutional protections that preserve religious liberty for every American. Our nation's commitment to freedom of conscience has allowed people of diverse beliefs to live together peacefully, and preserving that freedom remains essential to the principles upon which the United States was founded.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your continued efforts to protect the religious liberties guaranteed by the Constitution.

Respectfully,

Melquisedec Valera

Copy That

From: BEATRICE GONET <bgonet1936@gmail.com>
To: "RLC@usdoj.gov" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 14:50:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

I respectfully disagree with the RLC statement regarding religious liberty. As a practicing Seventh-Day Adventist I cherish my Creator God's gift of liberty of conscience to be free to choose to worship according to His Holy Word which includes observing the 7th day Sabbath. Sinful man changed the day, not the Creator Who never changes. His beautiful plan of salvation is the complete restoration of what disobedience took away,sin will not rise up the second time, Nahum 1:9, Heb. 9:28
Sincerely, Beatrice A Gonet

From: Rubens Moreno <[redacted]>
To: "RLC" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT — Establishment Clause - Rubens Moreno
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 15:07:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I'm a Seventh-day Adventist, and for my church, religious persecution in America wasn't something we only read about — it happened to us.

Between 1885 and 1896, dozens of Adventists were hauled into court under state Sunday laws. They were fined, locked up, and even chained alongside criminals on prison work gangs — not for harming a soul, but for quietly plowing their own fields or opening their own shops on a Sunday, after they had already rested on the seventh-day Sabbath their Bible told them to keep. And the whole time, those laws were defended in almost the same words some ideas in your draft report are defended today: as a way of honoring the nation's Christian character.

Back in 1888, a man named A. T. Jones stood before a U.S. Senate committee to argue against a proposed national Sunday-rest law. Here's the part I most want you to notice: he didn't only warn the people on the losing side of the vote — he warned the majority itself. His words were, "No man can allow any legislation in behalf of the religion, or the religious observances, in which he himself believes, without forfeiting his own religious freedom." In plain terms: the moment you let the government put its muscle behind your faith, you've handed it the power to box in someone else's — and someday, your own. That warning, and not any dislike of religion, is why my church has defended the wall between church and state for almost 140 years now — from the old *American Sentinel* in Jones's day to *Liberty* magazine in ours.

Now, I don't want you to hear only complaint from me. There is real good in your draft report, and I'm thankful for it. Protecting people's right to religious accommodation at work means the world to Sabbath-keepers like me — it can be the difference between honoring my day of rest and losing my job. And your concern for the rights of conscience is right and good. Please keep every bit of that. On those things, I'm with you.

But there is one recommendation I have to push back on as firmly as I know how — the push for the Department of Justice to back laws forcing public schools to post the Ten Commandments. And here's what might surprise you: I object not because I take the Ten Commandments lightly, but because I take them as seriously as anything in this world. To me they are the sacred, binding law of God. That is exactly why I don't want the government's hands on them. Let me give you three plain reasons.

First, look at what the opening commandments actually are: have no other gods, make no idols, don't misuse God's name, keep the Sabbath holy. Every one of them is about a person's relationship with God — worship, reverence, devotion. That simply isn't the government's department. When the state orders those words posted and promoted by law, it is stepping onto ground that belongs to God alone. Jones put it to the Senate better than I could: "We deny, forever, the right of any civil government to legislate in anything that pertains to men's duty to God under the first four commandments." And he boiled it down to one line I'd gladly hang on my wall — "Only God Can Enforce the Decalogue" (the Decalogue simply meaning the Ten Commandments).

Second, there's a question the people pushing this don't seem to want to face: whose Ten Commandments? Protestants, Catholics, and Jews don't number them the same way, and they don't even word them the same way. So the minute a school is told to hang up "the" Ten Commandments, somebody has to choose a version — which means the government has quietly settled a religious dispute it has no business settling. That is the very thing the Establishment Clause was written to stop.

Third — and this one is just common sense — making children look at something doesn't make them believe it. A child who sees Scripture treated as government-issued wall decoration doesn't learn to see it as holy; he learns to see it as ordinary, like an exit sign over a door. Sacred words come alive in hearts that choose them freely — in homes, in churches — not because a statute bolted them above a chalkboard.

If what the Commission truly wants is to help shape the character of children — and that is a good thing to want — there is a better road, and it never crosses the line. Stand up for parents' right to raise their children in their faith. Support real school choice, religious schools included. Protect the free exercise of religion for everyone. You can do all of it without ever stamping God's law with a government seal.

So here is my plea, and it's a simple one. Keep every protection in your report that guards a person's freedom to live out their faith — I'm grateful for those, and it's minorities like mine who need them most. But please drop the parts that hand the government a role in religion itself: the reinterpreting of church-state separation, the mandated displays, and the government-sponsored religious instruction. History runs in a pattern, and my own church still carries the scars that prove it: laws written to favor the majority's religion always fall hardest on the minority's. Protecting everyone's freedom to worship and keeping the government out of the religion business are not opposites — they are the same promise, and they stand or fall together.

Thank you for reading this, and for the work you are doing.

Respectfully,
Rubens Moreno

From: Deborah Corcoran <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 15:13:04 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the person reading this comment, Greetings :) I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian which believes with all of my being in the separation of church and state. God gave me the freedom to choose Hime in my life and God gives us the freedom to choose our religion without any compulsion . Historically when people have been compelled by the state /country governments to worship under their guidelines and laws, it causes harm and many problems. I agree and support the Pillars of Freedom statements. Thank you for your time to consider my appeal. Deb Corcoran

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

[redacted]

DOJ-RLC Comment-020011

these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020012

> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020013

sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020014

of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020015

ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

DOJ-RLC Comment-020016

there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

PII

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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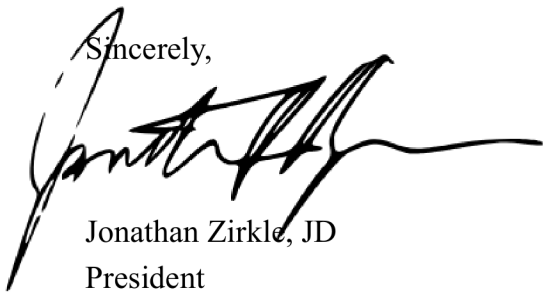
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020023

From: Lynne Burk <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State Opinion and Plea to be heard...
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 15:35:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

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 (Hereinafter “RLC”) Draft Report, Issued June 2026

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

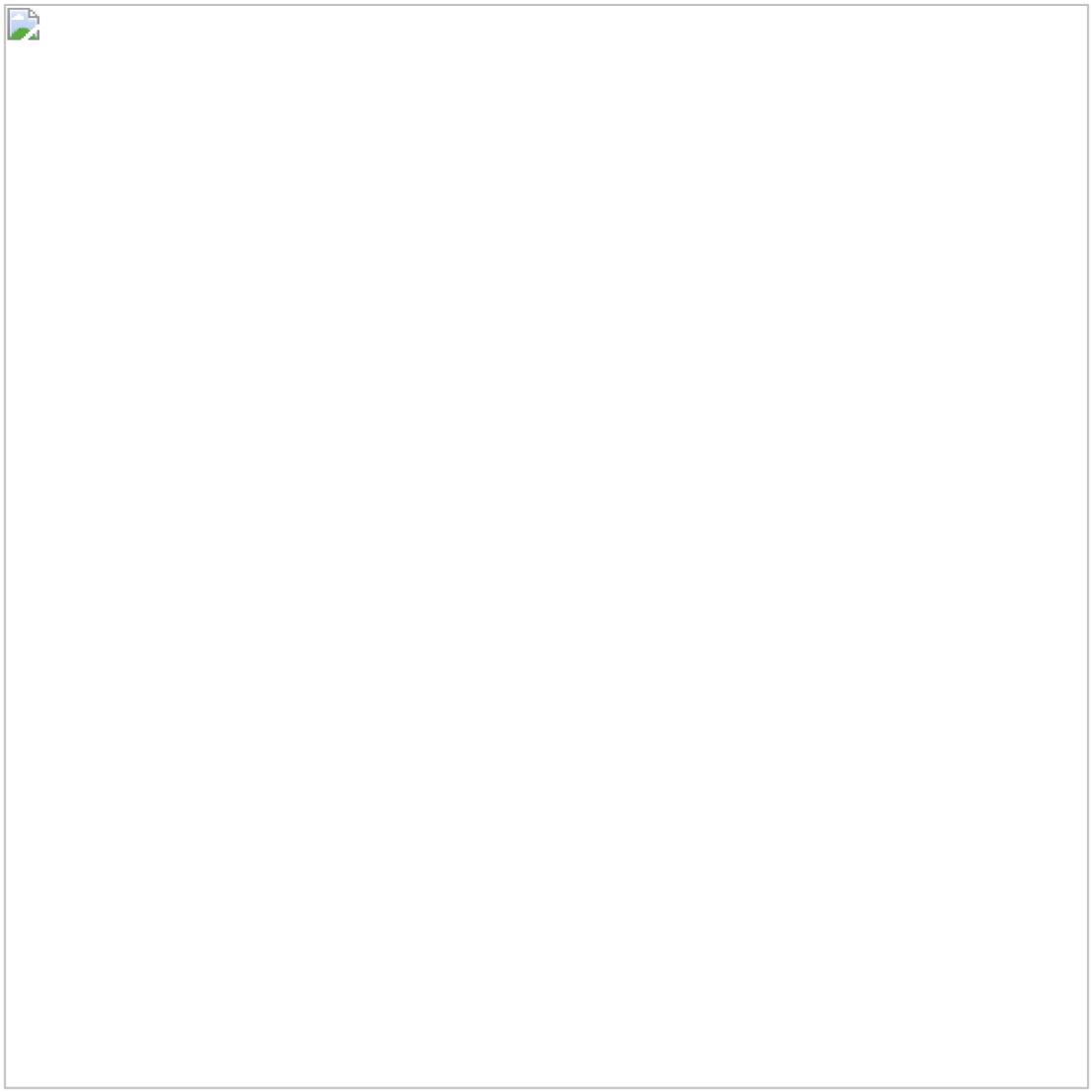
I am a Retired Nurse and a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian and a devoted, proud American. I have 2 grandfathers who fought in the Revolutionary War. I am told Abraham Lincoln is on my father's side of the family. I am invested in the welfare of the American people as well as the world's people in whom America influences. I will begin to share using my friend's words in this letter as they are how I would want to say what I believe. "As such I love, value, and keep the Biblical Sabbath, which is to be kept holy on the 7th day of the week, Saturday, which God instituted and sanctified at creation (Genesis 2:1-3), which was commanded in the Ten Commandments as the 4th commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), which Jesus kept throughout His life (Luke 4:16), and which His closest friends and disciples kept at the time of His death and resurrection (Luke 23:54-56; Luke 24:1-2).

Unfortunately, the majority of the Christian world does not keep the Biblical Sabbath holy. Sadly, it is only a minority of the Christian world that remembers the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as is commanded in Exodus 20:8-11.

If church or religious activity is mingled with the state, state action or government authority, by a “bridge” or otherwise, it will inevitably lead to the preference of one religion over another. We have seen this time and again throughout history, as beautifully described by the comments submitted by Heritage and Hope Ministry (https://heritageandhope.org/) and Pillar of Freedom (https://pillaroffreedom.org/)

I agree with both of their comments and responses to the RLC's Report and I hereby incorporate both herein by reference. Their respective comments can be found here:

1. Heritage and Hope Ministry:



1. Pillar of Freedom: https://drive.google.com/file/d/13wd1AsF3m6STwD-v0ywpXFYnI-VRv8TF/view?usp=drive_link

I object to the Religious Liberty Commission Report's dismissal and denigration of the metaphor of the "wall of separation between church and state." The wall of separation between church and state DOES exist in our U.S. Constitution. Although those particular words are not used, the concept of the wall of separation of church and state is memorialized and established in the First Amendment by the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause, as follows: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." U.S. Const. amend. I, cl. 1.

The purpose of these two clauses set forth in the First Amendment is to keep separate church and state, so that the two are not mingled by a “bridge” or otherwise. Religious freedom and liberty of conscience cannot exist without this separation of church and state. Liberty of conscience is the fundamental right of an individual to follow their own moral and religious beliefs without coercion, interference, or punishment from the government or society. The separation of church and state is vitally and critically important to preserve and protect every individual person’s freedom to think, believe, and act according to one’s own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority. It is vital to protect every individual from coercion, in order that no one is forced to act against their conscience, nor penalized for their sincere beliefs.

The preservation of the separation between church and state is vital to avoid state or government’s preference of one religion over another, in order that all people can enjoy the freedom to think, believe, and act according to one’s own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to:

1. Reconsider, retract and redraft its report;

2. Reconsider and reject any interpretation of the U.S. Constitution that diminishes, dismisses or denigrates the historic separation of church and state, and maintain proper boundaries between the state and government authority and matters of conscience, to preserve liberty of conscience;

3. Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities;

4. Withdraw any recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment, and

5. Consider fully enforcing the Johnson Amendment, which would restrict the political activities of churches.

Thank you for considering my thoughts, objections and recommendations on this matter."

With kind regards,

Verna L. Burk R.N. and Pastor's Wife

From: Mark Wessel <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report Comments
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 15:49:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Christian and member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I am gravely concerned about your draft report, both in the way it mischaracterizes our country's history, and in the recommendations made.

First, it should be clarified that the strength and success of our "American experiment" has always depended on two things:

1) Government of the people by the people, i.e. a republic.
2) Religious freedom, i.e. separation of church and state.

Regarding religious freedom, history has proven conclusively that the stronger the connection between church and state, the greater the oppression of the people. Many people throughout our history emigrated to this country specifically because the joint church/state power in their country of origin was so oppressive. Although some of the first colonists proceeded to make the same mistake, Rhode Island became a model of religious liberty resulting from separation of church and state, and its thriving success influenced other colonies, state constitutions, and the U.S constitution. *This* is the history that should inform our decisions today.

The draft report documents examples of religious persecution and highlights the need for religious liberty, but erroneously concludes that the solution is to *break down* the barriers between church and state.

Unfortunately, in any system there will always be some degree of unfairness, repression, and corruption. But, of all fears for religious liberty, the fear of the state is the greatest. We must therefore always err on the side of restricting state involvement in religious matters.

Once the state involves itself in matters such as religious school funding or posting of the ten commandments in public places, it cannot avoid deciding religious questions. For example, should a religious school that teaches racism not receive equal state funding consideration? If the ten commandments are to be posted in public places, which version should be used? Decisions regarding such questions cannot help but favor one religion over another, resulting in the tyranny of the majority that our constitution tries so hard to avoid.

The Commission also recommends that the Johnson Amendment be repealed. This is a truly horrific idea. It would directly inject political/financial corruption into the churches, thereby working to destroy the religious institutions the Commission claims it wants to protect. The recommendation should instead be that the Johnson Amendment be *enforced*.

I urge you to revise your report pursuant to the above comments and recommend that separation of church and state be maintained.

Sincerely,

Mark Wessel
Ventura, CA

From: Andrew Benoit <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment--Separation of Church and State--Andrew Benoit
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 15:52:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I can see where it may be tempting for conservative, Republican administrations to want to lessen or eliminate the separation of church and government. Conservatives are generally more sympathetic toward Christians and their churches and generally get more votes from Christians; and in recent years the principle of "separation of church and state" has come to be associated with atheism and with religions that are not of God. But when church and state seek to join forces, there are undesirable consequences, which I will list and explain as briefly as I can.

First and most obvious is the financial consequences—churches that receive government grants and loans seek to do and teach and preach things that are unoffensive to the governmental entity that supplied the money. And it goes the other way as well—if churches become permitted to make political donations, then the recipients of those funds would do the bidding of those making the donations.

A second consequence of church/state alliances is that since there are such vast differences among Christian denominations, any action taken in favor of one type of Christianity would make other types of Christians uncomfortable. A couple of examples: Allowing school prayers to be said by a Catholic who prays the "hail Mary" (which is unacceptable to Protestant Christians) or posting the Protestant Ten Commandments (which differ from the Catholic Ten Commandments) on the wall in a school classroom.

A third consequence of church/state alliances—and the one which concerns me the most—is that it would be detrimental to the relatively small, minority (in this context, I'm referring to membership numbers, not Race) Christian denominations. I am a Seventh-day Adventist, which is a worldwide Christian denomination with origins in the United States which strongly believes in and worships on the Biblical seventh-day Sabbath. I am concerned that alliances between church and state might result in the creation of Sunday "blue laws" which restrict commerce on Sunday and force businesses to close on Sunday. Because Seventh-day Adventists and other Sabbath keepers get our rest and worship on the 7th day, Saturday Sabbath, we consider Sunday to be a workday like Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. For those of us not privileged to have a Monday-Friday, 9-5 job, we rely on being able to work on Sundays to make ends meet. So, it concerns us to see a potential situation where the state may be influenced by the large, majority, Sunday-keeping Christian denominations to enact blue laws which would make it more difficult to earn a living by keeping us from working on Sunday. Government interference in religion could also lead to more persecution of Sabbath-keeping Christians and other "unconventional" Christians if we are seen as not "recognized" or "endorsed" by government in the way that the large, well-known denominations would be.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to keep church and state separate.

Thank you, and God Bless America

Andrew Benoit

From: travis harbaugh <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 16:08:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

The separation of church and state is among profoundly founded in the root in the history of America and grounded in our constitution and centered on our freedom.
I am a Seven-day-Adventist and I believe in the separation of Church and State. In my family history I know my ancestors came to the United States for this very reason because they came from a part of Europe. There were a lot of religious wars going on and we were recruited to avoid the religious wars and we came over with that wave of immigrants. So we came for religious liberty.
My last name is Harbaugh which traces back its roots back to the Palatinate (Pfalz) region of Germany, particularly around Kaiserslautern. It's the Americanized spelling of the German name "Harbaugh", which comes from middle high general words har (meaning “army”) and Bach (meaning :stream). The harbaugh surname traces its roots back to the Palatinate (Pfalz) region of Germany. Particularly around Kaiserslautern.
Ancestors like "Yost Harbaugh" emigrated from Germany to Philadelphia in 1736. They settled in an area of Maryland and Pennsylvania and later became known as the Harbaugh Valley. My Moms last name is Steffen which traces its roots back to Germany and Northern Europe. The mane evolved as a short form and variant of the personal name Stephany’s (Latin), which ultimately derives from the Ancient Greek name Stephany’s, meaning “Crown: or Garland”. Beginning in the late 1700’s , many Steffen families emigrated from regions of early Germany (like Prussia and the Palatinate to settle in areas like Pennsylvania.

History (Constantine and the Edict of Milan)

History provides a sobering reminder that even well-intentioned efforts to promote religious liberty can produce unintended consequences when the institutional separation between and state is weakened.
The Edict of Milan, issued in A.D. 313 by Constantine and Licinius, is often remembered as a landmark declaration of religious freedom. It ended the empire’s persecution of Christians and extended liberty of worship not only to Christians but to all people, allowing individuals to follow the religion of their choosing. At its inception, The Edict presented a broad commitment to religious liberty and equal protection under the law.

However, the years that followed demonstrate how quickly those ideals can erode when the government becomes entangled with religious institutions. As Influential church leaders developed close political relationships with the imperial government, questions that had once belonged to religious communities became a matter of state authority. Rather than simply protecting the free exercise of religion, the government was asked to determine which religious groups qualified as legitimate Christians and therefore were entitled to receive the protection and property restored under the Edict.

The Marked a profound shift. What had begun as a guarantee of religious liberty for all gradually became a system in which the state recognized and favored one religious body over others. Within little more than a decade, the principle of equal religious freedom had been substantially narrowed, Imperial authority was increasingly used to resolve theological disputes, distinguish orthodox from heresy, and support one religious institution with the power of the state. By A.D 321, Constantine had enacted Sunday legislation, and in the decades that followed, the relationship between church and state became even more deeply intertwined.

Whether one agrees with every historical interpretation of these events, the broader lesson remains significant: when the government moves from protecting religious liberty to determining which religious beliefs, organizations, or leaders deserve official recognition or government support, the freedom of all religious communities is placed at risk.

This Historical experience should serve as a cautionary example for the Religious liberty commission. The Commission proposed replacing the living stand principle of separation between church and state with a closer partnership. While that proposal may be motivated by good intentions, history demonstrates that bringing the instructional divide between religion and government was often produced the opposite of its intended result. What begins as cooperation can gradually become dependence; what begins as equal protection can evolve into government preference; and what begins as religious liberty can eventually result in restriction upon those whose beliefs differ from the favored religious viewpoint.

My concern is not merely historical but constitutional. Once the government acquires the authority to determine which religious organization receives public benefits, funding, recognition, or influence, it inevitably must decide which beliefs qualify and which do not. That places civil government in the position of making religious judgments—a role the First Amendment was designed to prevent.

This concern is especially relevant when the Commission's report places a particular emphasis on Christianity. Although the Founding Fathers were influenced by their own religious beliefs, they deliberately chose not to establish Christianity as the nation's official religion. Instead, they adopted the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause to ensure that the government neither established religion nor interfered with the free exercise of religion. Their constructional framework protected Christianity by refusing to give it governmental control, while equally protecting every one faith and the rights of those with no religious affiliation.
Had the Framers intended to create a formal partnership between church and state, they could have written such authority into the Constitution. They did not. Instead, they established constitutional principles that limit governmental authority over religion and preserve the interdependence of religious institutions from political power.
History of A.D. 313 should therefore be remembered not only as the beginning of religious toleration, but also as a warning about how quickly livery can diminish once church and state become institutionally connected. The lesson is that religious freedom is most secure when the government protects every person's liberty equally without deciding which faith should receive special recognition, political influence, or governmental partnership.

The Constitution (The Establishment Clause and Free Exercise Clause)

The Religious Liberty commission's report fundamentally mischaracterized one of the Constitution's most enduring principles by suggesting that the "wall of separation" between church and state should be replaced with a "bridge." These metaphors represent fundamentally different constitutional concepts. A wall establishes a boundary that protects two distinct spheres from governmental intrusion into matters of religion and religious influence over civil government. A bridge, by contrast, is designed to connect two separate domains, allowing interaction and passage between them. Replacing the constitutional concept of a way with a bridge alters the very purpose of the first Amendment's religious protections.

Critics often argue that the act phrase" separation of church and state" does not appear in the constitution. While this is literally true, the constitutional principles that gave rise to that expression are unmistakably present. The first amendment provides that "congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Together with the prohibition on religious tests for public office found in Article Vi, these provisions establish the constitutional framework that prevents the government from establishing, favoring or compelling religion while simultaneously safeguarding every individual's right to freely exercise their faith.

The wall of separation is therefore not a constitutional invention created after the fact; it is a description of the legal boundaries established by the constitution itself. The framers recognized that both the religion and civil government are strengthened when each operates within its own proper sphere. The constitutional safeguards against religious establishment and religious correction were deliberately adopted to preserve both religious liberty and government neutrality.

Consequently, it is misleading to suggest that the principle of separation lacks constitutional foundation simply because the specific phrase does not appear in the constitutional text. Constitutional principles are derived not only from particular words but also from the structure, purpose, and legal effect of provisions adopted by the framers. The doctrine of separation of church and state accurately describes the constitutional barriers erected by the First amendment and related constitutional provisions.

Moreover, the concept long predates the drafting of the United States constitution. In the 1630s, Roger Williams advanced the principle that civil government and religious instructions should remain institutionally distinct. After founding Rhodesia Island, he consistently argument throughout the 1640s that a "wall of separation" was necessary to preserve the purity of the church while prevent government interference in matters of faith. His writing, particularly those published in 1644, articulated the principle that a protective wall should separate the church from the civil world, thereby safeguarding both religious liberty and civil authority. These ideas significantly inflicted the broader tradition of religious freedom that ultimately informed America's constitutional order.

For these reasons, replacing the conditional concept of a wall with the metaphor of a bridge is not a mere rhetorical change. A wall preserves constitution boundaries and protects the interdependence of both church and state. A bridge, however implies institutional connection and governmental entanglement-precisely the conditions the Framer sought to prevent through the Religion Clause of the First Amendment.

Addressing some of the points of the drafted Document

The commission raised important concerns about supporting workmen facing unplanned pregnancies and ensuring they have acres of meaningful assistance. Those are worthy objectives, and communities of faith have long played a virtual role in providing compassionate care and practice support. My concern, however, les not with the goal, but with the mechanism of government funding.

When the Government finances religious organizations, it inevitably assumes the authority to define which organizations receive funding and which do not. With that authority becomes the potential to impose eligibility requirements, regulatory conditions, or ideological standards that may conflict with the religious convictions of those organizations. Over time, this creates a relationship in which religious

instructions become increasingly dependent upon government approval rather than remain accountable first and foremost to their faith and mission.
Scripture causation believers against relying upon human wisdom or compromising their convictions for worldly gain. Proverbs 3:7 instructs, “Be not side in your own eyes.” There is a legitimate concern that government funding can gradually encourage moisturizes to conform their programs or priories to governmental expectations rather than biblical principles. In such circumstances, assistance may become conditioned upon compliance with policies or agendas that do not reflect the teaching of Scripture.
For Christian’s, Christ’s ministry provides a different model. Jesus invited all people, saying, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Likewise Scripture repeatedly calls the Eliezer to care for those in need without partiality or poetical consideration (Isaiah 58). Christian charity is intended to reflect God’s love freely and faithfully, rather than becoming dependent upon government partnerships that may compromise its independence or witness.
Another area of significant concern is the proposal to repeal the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits organizations recognized under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, including Churches, from endorsing or opposing political candidates while maintaining their tax-exempt states. Churches remain free to address moral, social, and public policy issues, but they may not intervene in political campaigns on behalf of or in opposition to specific candidates.
This distinction serves an Important public purpose. Contributions to political campaigns are generally not tax-deductible, whereas charitable donations to churches are. If the Johnson Amendment were repealed, churches could effectively become vehicles for financing political campaigns through tax-deductible contributions. Such an arrangement would blur the constitutional and ethical distinctions between charitable giving and protocol fundraising.
Beyond the financial implications, repeal could fundamentally alter the relationship between churches and elected officials. Political candidates naturally seek support from influential institutions, while institutions that acutely support candidates may expect favorable treatment in return. This reciprocal relationship risks entangling religious organizations in partisan policies and creating precisely the kind of code alliance between church and state the Constitution was designed to avoid.
Some argue that the Johnson Amendment unnecessarily restricts the free speech rights of churches. However, the issue is not whether churches may speak on matters of faith or public concern—they unquestionably may. Rather, the limitation reflects the unity we tax status granted to charitable organizations. Political unique tax status granted to charitable organizations. Political campaign activity and charitable religious action are treated differently under the tax code because they serve different public purposes. The Johnson Amendment represents a longstanding compromise that preserves both religious liberty and the integrity of the tax system by preventing tax-subsidized political campaigns.
For these reasons, repealing the Johnson Amendment would not merely expand speech; it would create new opportunities for political influence, financial abuse, and institutional entanglement between church and state. Maintaining the current framework helps preserve the independence, credibility, and spiritual mission of religious organizations while protecting the constitutional principles that safeguard both religion and government.

Biblical Principles Supporting the Separation of church and state Scripture (Saul, Jesus, Daniel, and Jeremiah)

In addition to the historical and constitutional consideration discord above, Scripture itself demonstrates the wisdom of maintaining a distinction between religious authors and civil power. Throughout the Bible, the misuse of political authority in matters of faith repeatedly results in Injustice, coercion, and the corruption of both religion and government.
One of the earliest examples is found in the life of King Saul. In 1 Samuel 13, Saul assumed a priestly function by offering sacrifices rather than waiting for prophet Samuel as God had commanded. Although

his intentions may have appeared practical, God rebuked Saul because he crossed a boundary that God Himself had established. The account illustrates that God assigns different responsibilities to civil and religious leadership, and those distinctions are not to be disregarded.

The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ provides an even clear example. The religious leaders who rejected Christ lacked the civil authority to carry out His execution, so they appealed to the Roman government to accomplish what they could not do themselves. By combining religious accusations with political power, they secured Christ's crucifixion. The greatest miscarriage of justice in human history occurred when religious authorities enlisted the power of the state to enforce religious objects.
Jesus consistently rejects this model. Standing before Pontus Pilate, He declared: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom where of this world, then would my servant fight…. But now is my kingdom not from hence." (John 18:38, KJV).

Christ made it unmistakably clear that His kingdom advances through truth, conviction, and voluntary faith—not through political force or civil authority. Likewise, when quested about paying tribute to Caesar, Jesus responded:
"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; And unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21, KJV)
In this statement, Christ recognized two distinct spheres of authority. Civil government processes legitimate authority over civil matters, while God alone possesses authority over worship, conscience, and the human heart. These two spheres should not be confused or merged.
The prophetic books likewise warn against the dangers of religious and political power becoming untied. Daniel portrays earthly kingdom repeatedly attempting to exercise authority over matters that belong to God alone. The "little horn" described in Daniel seek both political dominion and religious authority, illustrating the danger that arises whenever civil power is implied enforce religious doctrine. Whether one approaches these prophecies historically or prophetically, the consistent biblical theme is that God's people should never rely upon the coercive power of the state to accomplish spiritual objectives.
Scripture teaches that righteousness cannot be produced by legislation because true obedience is a matter of the heart. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God declared:
"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel… I will put my laws in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." (Jeremiah 31:33, KJV)
God's law is written upon the heart by the work of the Holy Spirit, not imposed through civil statues or governmental authority. Genuine faith cannot be compelled because it is the product of inward transformation that only god can accomplish.
Jeremiah further reminds us of humanity's inability to transform itself:
"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23, KJV)
The point is not that people are beyond hope, but that lasting spiritual change comes from God rather than from human institutions. Christians are therefore called to proclaim the gospel, demonstrate mercy, and invite others to fight—not compel belief though political influence or governmental power.
This principle is evident throughout Scripture. Daniel did not seek political authority to establish God's kingdom. Instead, he relied upon prayer, divine revelation, and faithful witness. When the wise men of Babylon failed to reveal the king's dream, Daniel declared, "There is a God in heaven that revealed secrets" (Daniel 2:28). God's truth was vindicate not through coercion but through revelation. Throughout the book of Daniel, God's kingdom advance by faithful testimony rather than by the force of government.
These biblical principles closely parallel the constitutional safeguards established by the Founders. Although many of the Founders were Christians, they deliberately refrained from establishing Christianity as the nation's official religion. Instead, they recognized that religious liberty is best preserved when the

government protects every person's freedom of conscience without determining theological truth or favoring one faith over another.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to confer that the constitutional separation between church and state is not hostile to Christianity. Rather, it reflects a biblical principle that protects both religious liberty and the integrity of Christ's mission. Christ never instructed His followers to advance His kingdom through the authority of the state. His kingdom is built upon conviction rather than coercion, faith rather than force, and transformed hearts rather than government mandates.

History, The Constitution, and Scriptures all point to the same conclusion: whenever the wall separating church and state is replaced with a bridge of instructional partnership, both religious liberty and the purity of the church are placed at risk. Preserving that separation protects the freedom of every American to worship God according to conscience while ensuring that faith remains the voluntary response of the heart to God's grace.

Sincerely,
Travis Harbaugh

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment on the draft report of the "Presidential Religious Liberty Commission" Fred Garber
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 16:17:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I direct your attention to the well crafted response you have received from; Jonathan Zirkle, PILLAR OF FREEDOM. I am a Seventh day Adventist Christian who observes the seventh day Sabbath as commanded by God in Exodus 20: 8-11, and Genesis 2: 1, 3. I am well aware that government interference with religion could interfere with my conscientious observation of a day other than the more popular first day of the week, Sunday. I have always believed that the first amendment to the US Constitution protected me from any nefarious meddling by the government, no matter how well intentioned. I direct your attention to the Biblical examples found in Daniel 3: 1-21, Daniel 6: 1-16. Please take the time to read and meditate on these Biblical accounts. You might also remember the 1200 years of Papal persecution of untold millions of Christians who chose to not conform to the mandates of a state sponsored way of belief and worship. This great nation we call our home has been and is still great because we have had a government without a king, and a Church without a pope. The amalgamation of government and religion however well intentioned has never worked out well. We don't need a bridge ultimately leading to persecution, we need a respectful and well maintained wall. Fred Garber, Leesburg, Fl.
Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: Jack Pavlik <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 16:25:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

Im a conservative republican, but more important I'm a 7th day Adventist.
And we'll versed on our countries history of this most important subject.
Plus the history of the KJV Bible events and prophecies.
The book :the great controversy. Would most important to read before anyone hasten we pushing to comb church and State. Our fore fathers were wise when they inject it in the CONSTITUTION and amendments.
I myself and others are praying for God's wisdom to you.
Also praying God's mercy for the poor souls that ends separation of church and State, because end times will come quickly and just as God said woe to those involved

From: Tamara Schoch <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause and Religious Liberty – Tamara Schoch
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 16:44:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I am writing to respectfully express my concern regarding any recommendation to reinterpret the Establishment Clause in a way that weakens the historic separation of church and state. I believe such a change would depart from both the intent of the First Amendment and the biblical principle that matters of conscience belong to God, not to civil government.

The First Amendment protects religious liberty through two complementary safeguards. The Establishment Clause prevents the government from exercising authority over religion, while the Free Exercise Clause guarantees every individual's right to worship—or not worship—according to conscience. Together, these protections have made the United States a remarkable example of religious freedom.

The founders understood that faith and government each have important but distinct roles. Thomas Jefferson described this relationship as a "wall of separation between church and state," expressing a principle already embodied in the Constitution. James Madison argued that religion can only be directed by reason and conviction, never by force, and later observed that both religion and government remain purer when they are kept separate. Benjamin Franklin likewise recognized that genuine faith should rest on truth and persuasion rather than the power of the state.

This understanding is also consistent with Scripture. Jesus' instruction to "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" establishes a distinction between civil authority and the authority of conscience. Government has a vital role in preserving justice and protecting the rights of all citizens, but it was never intended to determine religious belief or practice.

History repeatedly demonstrates the dangers of blending religious authority with civil power. Whenever governments have enforced religious practice, the result has too often been coercion, division, and the loss of religious liberty. Many early Americans came to this country seeking freedom from state-controlled religion, and the framers intentionally prohibited religious establishments and religious tests for public office to protect that liberty.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I am especially mindful of this history. During the late nineteenth century, Sabbath observers were imprisoned under Sunday laws despite peacefully following their own convictions. Their experience reminds us that when government is given authority over religious matters, even well-intentioned majorities can unintentionally violate the rights of others.

A government empowered to favor one faith is also empowered to disadvantage another. Lasting religious liberty depends not on which group holds political influence, but on equal protection for every person's conscience. America's constitutional framework has allowed religion to flourish because faith has been advanced through conviction rather than government authority.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the historic understanding of the Establishment Clause and reject any interpretation that diminishes the separation of church and state. Protecting that boundary safeguards both religious freedom and the integrity of religion itself, ensuring liberty for all Americans regardless of their beliefs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Tamara Schoch



Virus-free.www.avg.com

From: Michael Snyder <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Sunday Laws
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 16:46:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

It is a violation of my religious liberty for the US government to dictate any day of worship. I object to any thoughts or actions taken of establishing a national day of rest for any reason, on any day, especially Sunday.
There are multiple reasons this is wrong headed.
1. Sunday is not a biblical day of rest, Saturday from Sundown Friday until sundown Saturday is the biblical sabbath as found in the bible Ten commandments and every other page of holy writ.
2. Our Lord Jesus Christ is Lord of the Sabbath not Sunday and therefore "The Lord's day is not Sunday, but rather Sabbath. There is not one shred of biblical evidence that any man has the authority to change God's law, not even the Apostles. It was never changed. In fact, they all kept the seventh day sabbath, not Sunday.
3. The USA constitution contains the basis of our Religious liberty and the government would violate the constitution by establishing a day of rest. No matter what day they chose it would violate someone's religious liberty. The government cannot do anything that would establish one religion over another as a state religion or religious belief.
4. This not the first time this debate has occurred, at the close of the last century, AT Jones, a prominent Seventh-day Adventist, offered testimony on behalf of all the peoples of this great nation to the congress of the United States and the movement died, thankfully. You should read this testimony.
5. You would be isolating some of this country's hardest workers, devout Seventh-day sabbatarians, including Jews in such a manner as to bring persecution, suffering and likely eventually jail or prison and fines for their violation of any Sunday law.
6. You are dealing with people who have chosen to follow Christ all the way, including keeping His sabbath day. Most will not betray their conscience and you will have no choice but to punish them.
7. Passing a Nation Sunday law accomplishes nothing to repair the great division in our country that is dividing on a basis of atheism and religion and globalism or keeping our sovereignty.
8. Passing a Sunday law is little different than the communist/socialist trying to bend your will against capitalism. Religion should not be the battlefield to solve these differences, especially when sabbatarians a a large support group for capitalism. We do not like communism or socialism.
9. The true battlefield is found in our philosophical differences with the globalist communists/socialists. We need to meet these arguments head on and stand our ground.
Passing a Sunday law benefits no one
10. Passing a National Sunday law in the dark, without the benefit of the sunlight of broader public opinion speaks ill of the character of the men and women trying to make this happen. We are a noble nation, not cowards, we claim to be the light on a hill, not the devil working in darkness. Please reconsider your position on this most important issue.

Blessings, praying God intervenes in this most heinous mistake.

Sent from my iPhone

From: Rod Cassidy <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Rod and Mary Cassidy
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 16:52:04 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

My wife and I were quite disturbed to read that the Commission wants to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "span" or “connection”, like a “bridge." With all due respect, that is exactly backwards — and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming.

There are a number of objections we have that need pointing out:

> Government Funding for religious non-profit activities.

> Government Funding religious education and for public campuses.

> Repealing the Johnson Amendment. Churches should not be made political platforms.

Many years ago, when I was employed with the county, work hours interfered with my faith to worship God according to the dictates of my conscience, on the Day He set aside to be kept holy. The attorney representing religious liberty issues for my church, the Seventh-day Adventist church was contacted and wrote a letter to the director of my department in the county. If this was a country that didn’t respect true religious liberty for its citizens, I would have been forced to work on hours violating my conscience or end up losing my job.

Further, my ancestors came to America from Europe due to the religious persecution and oppression facing them during WWII.

Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers, famously described the constitutional principle of the First Amendment in the phrase, “a wall of separation between Church & State.” Contrary to modern claims that this phrase has no constitutional significance, Jefferson was not inventing some new doctrine. He was describing a principle already embedded within the First Amendment: that government possesses no just or rightful authority to establish, direct, or compel religious observance.

That wall wasn't built by secularists to keep religious down. It was built by believers to keep the church free. A connection spanning the state with the church does not strengthen the church; it opens the door for government money and control, until churches are in competition for grants and answering to politicians instead of to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, persecution for the minority class results. This is a bad idea indeed and will end in the destruction of this great nation. We need to learn from history.

Please don't build that connection, that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it. We trust you will do the right thing.

Sincerely,

Rod & Mary Cassidy

Paradise, CA

From: Dwight Hibbert <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 17:01:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Addendum

In the late 1800s, over 100 Seventh-day Adventists were arrested, jailed, and sentenced to hard labor on chain gangs for working on Sundays.
These harsh punishments for violating Sunday blue laws, particularly in states like Tennessee and Arkansas, ultimately sparked a major denominational movement advocating for religious freedom.

The Harsh Reality of the Laws
Because Seventh-day Adventists observe the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), they refrained from work on Saturdays. Consequently, many rural farmers and laborers worked their fields on Sundays to survive.

This brought them into direct conflict with local "blue laws" designed to mandate Sunday rest and religious observance.Prosecutions: Between 1885 and 1896 alone, over 100 Adventists were prosecuted.

Time Served: Believers collectively spent 1,438 days in jail and 455 days serving on chain gangs.Chain Gangs:

In Tennessee, authorities revived the use of chain gangs specifically to punish Adventists. An iconic historical photograph documents nine Adventists, including an ordained minister, working in a chain gang in Rhea County, Tennessee.

Tragic ConsequencesThe enforcement of these laws was severe and sometimes deadly. In July 1878, Samuel Mitchell became the first Adventist martyr when he died after being held in a damp Quitman, Georgia, prison cell for plowing his field on a Sunday.

In 1891, Robert M. King, an Adventist from Tennessee who appealed his case to the U.S. Supreme Court, died of a heart attack while the legal battle was unfolding.

Advocacy and LegacyThe persecution caught the attention of religious lobbying groups, such as the National Reform Association, who petitioned the government to enshrine Christian values into the U.S. Constitution. In response, Adventists mobilized a fierce defense of religious liberty.

Church pioneers such as Alonzo T. Jones testified before the U.S. Senate in 1888 to successfully help defeat a proposed national Sunday law bill.The church also launched publications like The American Sentinel to advocate for the separation of church and state.
Finally, the biblical prophecy of Revelation 13 outlines a chilling future where civil and religious liberties are compromised, culminating in a global crisis of conscience. According to this prophetic perspective, the United States—initially symbolized by a lamb-like beast representing freedom and peace—will ultimately abandon its foundational principles, unite church and state, and enforce compulsory religious observances.
H.G.

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 17:50:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious LIberty Commission,

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen and member of a Christian denomination (Seventh-Day Adventist) that traditionally have taught for about 170 years the principles of separation of church and state--to which the murmurings of making the contrary happen we have known about for some time but never has it gained any traction on a government level until recent times and especially until now with the formation of this report. The principle of separation of church and state may not be explicit in the constitution, but it is no doubt implicit. And as such, I have a duty as a faithful Christian to point out respectfully where your commission has erred on matters of conscience, on matters of principle and human rights, on matters of faith and what God expects of us as individuals and as a country. The framers of our constitution understood this principle:

"In a free government the security for civil rights must be the same as that for religious rights. It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects." - **James Madison, the Federalist Papers**

Madison understood that the promotion of one religion over another by the government was a recipe for disaster. Back then, Madison was focused on a uniting states that were dominated by Puritans, Quakers, Anglican, Lutheran, Dutch Reformed, Presbyterians, Mennonites etc.. because many members of those sects have experienced persecution by the dominant Christian group. He also firmly believed that the government promoting one religion over another was on an immediate path to tyranny. In his famous 1785 essay, Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments, he argued that state-enforced religion corrupts the church, damages the government, and inevitably leads to the "diabolical principle of persecution." This conclusion was not just a theory, but was something he was actively observing in his day.

Many attribute the origin of the idea of separation of church and state to individuals of no faith but the opposite is true. Roger William was a minister, theologian, author and founder of the Providence Plantations, known today as the state of Rhode Island. And to him, or really to God, we owe the doctrine of separation of church and state.

One source provides the following synopsis:

"Initially a Puritan minister, his beliefs evolved and he questioned the authority of the Puritan church in enforcing religious conformity. He was expelled by the Puritan leaders from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and he established Providence Plantations in 1636 as a refuge offering what he termed "liberty of

conscience" making Rhode Island the first government in the Western world to guarantee religious freedom in its founding charter. His ideas on religious tolerance and civil government directly influenced the principles later enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. He briefly became a Baptist, and in 1638 he founded the First Baptist Church in America in Providence."

What follows are the points of objection that I have with your document. To be fully transparent, the crafting the following points is not wholly mine, but nevertheless I endorse every one of them. I hope you find these well, and that they are taken into serious consideration.

"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."

Executive Summary

This submission is presented as a formal public comment during the designated fifteen-day public review period for the Commission's draft report. While the Commission's stated intent is to safeguard the religious liberties of all Americans against secular encroachments, the underlying philosophy and specific recommendations of this draft represent a dangerous departure from the foundational principles of genuine religious liberty. By advocating for a "pro-religion" state, promoting the integration of church and state through "bridges," endorsing government funding of religious education, and elevating state-defined "spiritual fitness" within military institutions, the Commission's trajectory threatens to revive the very theological despotism that the American Constitution was designed to prevent.

True religious freedom is best preserved not when the state becomes a patron or promoter of religion, but when civil government remains strictly civil, leaving the relationship between the soul and the Creator entirely unencumbered.

1. The Fallacy of the "Pro-Religion" State and the "Cooperative Bridge"

The draft report explicitly rejects the concept of "secular neutrality," branding it as a totalizing ideology, and instead recommends that the federal government adopt an active "pro-religion" stance, treating religious exercise as a public good to be actively strengthened and supported through a "bridge" rather than a "wall" of separation.

The Critique:
Civil government has no legitimate authority or jurisdiction in the realm of religion. By definition, a civil government pertains only to civility—the relations of citizens to one another in secular society. When the state departs from its strictly civil boundaries to become "pro-religion" or to build a "bridge" of mutual support with religious bodies, it must inevitably answer a theological question: Which religion or sect is the state supporting?
If the state assumes the role of promoting religion because it is a "force for good," it assumes the right to judge what constitutes "genuine" or "acceptable" religion. This transforms civil public offices and courts of law into courts of theology. Any governmental effort to define, promote, or accommodate religion on a preferential or structured basis is the first step toward a union of church and state, which

historically has always terminated in religious despotism and the persecution of minority consciences. True liberty requires that religion be kept utterly and entirely free from both the hostility and the patronage of the state.

2. State Promotion of the Ten Commandments and Religious Displays

The Commission strongly supports the display of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms and advocates for the restoration of religious memorials, symbols, and literature on government and military property.

The Critique:

The Ten Commandments are divided into two distinct tables of law:

1. The first four commandments govern man's relationship, duty, and devotion directly to his Creator (worship, Sabbath observance, prohibition of idolatry).
2. The last six commandments govern man's civil relationship to his fellow man (prohibition of murder, theft, lying, etc.).

Civil government has a rightful authority to enforce civility—which overlaps with the moral principles of the second table of the law (protecting life, property, and truth). However, the state has absolutely no right to legislate upon, enforce, promote, or display anything related to the first table of the law. The duty we owe our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force, state patronage, or public displays. When public schools or government agencies display the Ten Commandments, they are utilizing the coercive apparatus of the state to promote a specific religious text that addresses man's direct duty to God. This is an impermissible usurpation of divine authority, putting Caesar in the place of God (Matthew 22:21).

3. The Repeal of the Johnson Amendment and the Politicization of the Pulpit

The draft report recommends the full repeal of the 1954 Johnson Amendment, advocating for the right of pastors and religious leaders to use their pulpits to provide "religious guidance" on political and partisan affairs, thereby serving as the "conscience of the state."

The Critique:

While religious leaders and individual believers must enjoy full freedom of speech to address moral and theological issues, the active effort to turn the pulpit into a vehicle for political campaigning is fundamentally corrupting to the church itself.

The gospel of Christ operates through the persuasive power of the Holy Spirit and the love of God, not through the coercive machinery of civil politics. When churches seek to enter the realm of civil law through the "gateway of politics" or align themselves with partisan factions to establish moral standards by force of law, they compromise their spiritual integrity. Historically, whenever the church has sought to direct or influence civil legislation through political alliances, it has abandoned its divine mandate and sought instead to wield the sword of the state. The pulpit must remain sacred, dedicated to the proclamation of truth, rather than a tool for partisan political action.

4. Universal School Choice and the Compromise of Public Funding

The Commission champions a "robust and universal system of school choice" where public taxpayer funding, vouchers, and special education funds follow students to religious schools, arguing that

excluding religious schools from generally available public benefits is unconstitutional discrimination.

The Critique:
While parents have a fundamental and natural right to direct the education of their children, the demand for state funding of religious education is a dangerous trap for religious institutions. Accepting state patronage, funding, or special legal favors inevitably invites state oversight, regulation, and eventual control. The state has a duty to ensure that public funds are spent in accordance with public standards. Consequently, when religious schools accept public vouchers, they grant the government a direct interest in their curriculum, hiring practices, and institutional mission. Further, for the state to distribute funds to religious schools, it must determine which schools are "substantial," "genuine," or "qualified" to receive those funds. This forces the state to make theological judgments, deciding which doctrines are acceptable for public funding and which are not. For the sake of their own independence and spiritual purity, religious institutions must refuse the unholy connection of state funding and rely solely on voluntary support.

5. Elevating "Spiritual Fitness" in State Entities

The Commission recommends that the Department of War elevate "spiritual fitness in military readiness" and issue a department-wide "Spiritual Fitness Guide" to support the "whole warfighter."
The Critique:
A government-issued "Spiritual Fitness Guide" represents a direct and egregious usurpation of divine authority. A secular, military department of the state has neither the theological credentials nor the spiritual authority to define, measure, or standardize the "spiritual fitness" of any human being. When the state attempts to measure or promote "holiness" or "spiritual readiness," it acts as an arbiter of the human soul. This can only lead to two outcomes: the enforcement of a state-sanctioned, watered-down religious standard, or the promotion of hypocrisy, where individuals must feign a specific type of "spiritual fitness" to secure professional advancement or avoid disfavor. Caesar has no business in the realm of the soul; spiritual fitness is a matter entirely between the individual conscience and God.

Conclusion
The draft report’s recommendations are framed as a defense of "religious liberty," but they are built upon the false premise that religious freedom is preserved when the state actively aligns with, funds, and promotes religion. History demonstrates the exact opposite: the first step toward religious tyranny is always a well-meaning "national tribute to the value of religion."

For true religious liberty to flourish, the government must remain entirely neutral between sects and strictly confined to civil affairs. The Commission's trajectory—attempting to build "bridges" between the city of God and the city of man, funding religious education, and establishing state standards for spiritual fitness—will ultimately compromise the purity of the church and invite the tyranny of the state. We urge the Commission to withdraw these recommendations and return to a historically sound, jurisdictional separation of church and state, where civil government minds civil affairs, and religion is left entirely to the voluntary devotion of the people.

Regards,
Jacin Labrador

From: Don Corcoran <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -- SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE -- DONALD R. CORCORAN
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 17:57:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission: Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns about your report.

I am a seventy-four-year-old Seventh-day Adventist Christian, an elder in my church, and would like to express my very deep concern about the proposed bridging of church and state. I am concerned because historically, whenever a worldly government and a religion have joined forces, it has always resulted in the loss of religious liberty and persecution toward those not of the majority faith.

Perhaps the most egregious example is the 1260 years of the Dark Ages from 538 to 1798 AD, when many millions of people were murdered for holding a minority faith in Europe. Another example is the European people's escape to the New World to get away from religious persecution and find freedom, as they sought a government without a king and a religion without a pope so they could raise their families in peace. It was religious freedom that brought that peace that led to the wonderful prosperity that America has experienced.

I am also concerned that there are many today who seek to establish a theocracy under Jesus Christ (whom I love and adore), even though He Himself plainly stated that His kingdom is **not** of this world (John18:36). Since Jesus didn't set up an earthly government, no one has the right to do that for Him. He will soon come in the clouds as King of kings and Lord of lords!

It is part of standard early Protestant (and Seventh-day Adventist) eschatology to interpret Revelation 13 as meaning that a global powerful religious entitiy (the beast from the sea) will use the most powerful earthly government to demand that the world should give homage to that beast. If I and my people can respectfully discourage the United States government from uniting with any religion, we may gain a few more years of freedom in which to spread the gospel before the return of Jesus Christ in glory.

Finally, I'd like to mention my concern about the proposed rescinding of the Johnson Amendment. Here again, when church and state unite, it works out corruption in them both by encouraging each to seek favors of the other. It is far better to leave the Johnson Amendment alone.

Respectfully,
Donald R. Corcoran
Naples, Florida

Sent with Proton Mail secure email.

From: N Walden <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State - Noella Walden
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 17:58:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a person of faith — a Seventh-day Adventist — to ask you to reconsider two of the report's central recommendations: repealing the Johnson Amendment and expanding government funding for religious activities.

My own faith tradition has a long history of defending church-state separation, not in spite of our beliefs but because of them. Adventists have observed a Saturday Sabbath in a culture built around Sunday, and our history includes real experience with Sunday closing laws that penalized us simply for practicing our faith on a different day. That history taught my church a lesson I still hold to: when the state starts endorsing or funding religious practice, it inevitably favors some consciences over others. Neutrality is what protects everyone, including minority faiths.

That's why I don't see the wall between church and state as something built against religion — I see it as what lets every conscience, not just the majority's, stay free. The moment a church takes government money or steps into partisan politics, it starts answering to someone other than God.

I'd ask the Commission to leave the Johnson Amendment in place, and to keep government funding out of religious activity altogether.

Thank you for considering this.

Sincerely,
Noella Walden
Wadesboro, NC

From: Linda Tipton <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Presidential Religious Liberty Commission's Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 18:01:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

In this country's history was an argument against such an attempt to combine church and state. In December 1888, Alonzo T. Jones presented his argument against the unifying of church and state. Mr. Jones' argument emphasized the importance of religious liberty by the separation of church and state. Mr. Jones also argued that civil government should never legislate regarding religious observances and that there are distinct areas of life governed by religion and civil authority that should not overlap. Mr. Jones emphasized that the government could regulate relationships among individuals but must respect the jurisdiction of religion over personal faith and practices.

Alonzo T. Jones' stance on religious liberty was shaped by his opposition of said 1888 Blair Sunday law bills in the U.S. Senate, which sought to impose Sunday as a national day of rest and require public schools to teach Christian principles, leading him to testify before Congress. His advocacy also reflected the Seventh-day Adventist Church's early commitment to promoting religious freedom as a universal human right.
Mr. Jones' significant arguments arose during the 1888 proposal of a national Sunday law. He contended that such a law would be unconstitutional. His main points included:
• Violation of Individual Rights: he believed that enforcing a specific day of worship infringed upon personal freedoms.
• Theological Overreach: He viewed the law as an attempt by certain religious groups to impose their beliefs on others, which he opposed vehemently.
It was
We know that God foretold in His Word that this country [identified as the beast that comes up out of the earth in Revelation 13] will take it upon herself to unite church and state.

We know that this will lead to the further legislation of the promoting of a specific day of worship like the proposed Sunday law in 1888 which was ruled then as unconstitutional and a violation of individual rights.

God tells us that this country will legislate against His authority established AT CREATION in the 4th commandment as a PERPETUAL MEMORIAL. The Sabbath, the Lord's day, mentioned the 4th commandment is the 7th day, Friday sunset through Saturday sunset. [Sunday has always been the first day of the week.]

For our final statement, we bring to your attention a portion of Mr. Jones' argument before the senate to keep in mind when the government of this free nation enacts Sunday Law Legislation:
Mr. Jones.-“Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”CAR 38.9
Voice.-Is that the seventh day or the first day?CAR 38.10
Mr. Jones.-The commandment says the seventh day, but in the face of this plain declaration of the Lord that the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, the Senate has put its own interpretation upon that commandment, and has declared that the statement that “the seventh day is the Sabbath” means “the first day of the week, commonly called Sunday.” Thus the Congress of the United States has taken the fourth commandment from the Bible and put it into its legislation, and has put its own interpretation upon that statute. If Congress can interpret the Bible in one point, it can interpret it on every other point. So that when it went beyond the Constitution of this country

in this thing, it has put itself and the government in line with all the Church-and-State governments that have ever been, and has assumed to itself to be the interpreter of the Bible for all the people in the land, and for all who come into the land. That is what has been done.CAR 38.11

It was this argument before the Senate by Mr. Alonzo T. Jones in December 1888 that gave this country's citizens continued freedom of conscience to this day.

We would like to state that first and foremost we stand grounded on the Word of God, then the Constitution and history as the basis for our convictions. Therefore, our position is against the unification of church and state.

Sincerely,

Allan and Linda Tipton

From: "Don A. Johnson" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church & State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 18:05:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

News and commentary from a Biblical world view on current events, top stories, social trends and political and religious events.

Urgent Appeal: Defend Religious Liberty Before July 13

July 7, 2026 by Andy Roman 7 Comments



The President's Religious Liberty Commission has opened a formal public comment period, allowing individuals the opportunity to submit written feedback and express their concerns regarding the Commission's work and recommendations. The deadline for submitting comments is July 13, 2026, making this a limited window to have your voices heard. Those who value the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state should prayerfully consider participating in this process.

Below is a sample letter prepared by Seventh-day Adventist attorney Jay Cameron that may be used as a guide when contacting the Religious Liberty Commission. You may personalize it if you wish. If you are concerned about preserving genuine religious liberty and protecting freedom of conscience for all people, please take a few moments to submit your comments before the July 13, 2026 deadline. Your voice can help maintain the constitutional safeguards that have long protected the religious freedom of all Americans.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Via EMAIL: PII

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,

Don A. JOHNSON & RUMIKO JOHNSON



From: Daniel Raullerson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 18:07:53 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

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

I, Daniel Raullerson, agree with The Pillars of Freedom comments. Please implement them of said letter. (View attachment).

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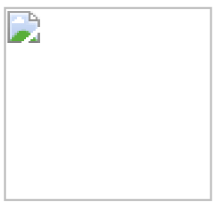

Daniel Raullerson
[redacted]

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

DOJ-RLC Comment-020070

Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

DOJ-RLC Comment-020071

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

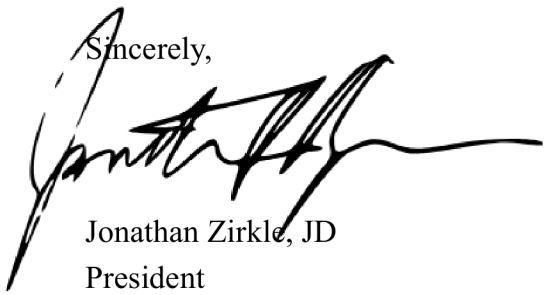
[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020072

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020073

From: Mary Henry <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Commission report response
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 18:12:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Please reconsider the recommendations set forth by your report. To build a "bridge" between church and state would be a grave mistake for our country to make. If churches are allowed to take money from government agencies, the government would hold sway over the decisions of the church. Our pioneer fathers came to this country to get away from government interference in religion.
The government has taken over our school system and dictated to teachers what they can and cannot teach. Those dictates have undermined our family units, destroyed moral standards and urged our children into rebellion against the authority of their parents.
That's what government does. That's what Hitler did. We fought a war against Hitler. Why would we adopt his tactics for our nation. The crusades were fought because people were against being dictated what, how and when to worship. Do we really want to go back there? I, for one, DO NOT.
No one, including a government, should dictate to anyone else those basic liberties set forth by God'
To do away with the Johnson Amendment is a step in the wrong direction. Keep the Johnson amendment intact, please.
I am a Seventh Day Adventist. One of our founding fathers fought to keep religious liberty and the right to worship freely as our own conscience directs
Churches, of any and every denomination, need to remain free from government interference and dictate. Being dictated to on what, when, or how to worship is not freedom. Just like if your try to force someone to love you, it is no longer love, forced religion is no longer worship or religion.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.
Please reconsider the recommendations of your report.

Mary Henry
Goldendale, Washington

From: Nelly Sinclair <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church & State (Recommendations 1 & 9) - Nelly Sinclair
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 18:14:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Re: Draft Report of the Religious Liberty Commission ("President Trump is Delivering on His Promise to Protect Religious Liberty," June 26, 2026) -- "12 Opportunities to Strengthen Religious Liberty for All Americans"

Submitted by: Nelly Sinclair, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, submitted in an individual capacity.

Date: July 12, 2026

I write in support of the Commission's stated goal of protecting the free exercise of religion for Americans of every faith, and to ask the Commission, in its final report, to safeguard rather than weaken the principle that has always stood alongside free exercise as its guarantee: the Establishment Clause's promise that government will not sponsor, fund, favor, or entangle itself with religion. I make this request not as an opponent of religious liberty but as a person of faith who depends on it. The separation of church and state is not a threat to religious devotion. It is the condition that makes genuine religious devotion possible -- and it protects churches from the corrupting embrace of the state at least as much as it protects citizens from an official religion.

This is not an abstract matter for me. I am a Seventh-day Adventist. Mine is a faith that keeps the seventh-day Sabbath and that has, from its beginnings, counted itself among the most steadfast defenders of religious liberty in America -- not in spite of our beliefs but because of them. We have learned, sometimes at our own expense, that when government aligns itself with a majority's religious practice, it is minority believers whose consciences are burdened first. Someone who has felt the weight of laws written around another community's day of worship does not experience the separation of church and state as hostility to faith. She experiences it as the very thing that lets her keep her own.

For that reason, several of the draft's "12 Opportunities" concern me -- most of all Recommendation 1 (executive guidance redefining the Establishment Clause and the separation of church and state) and Recommendation 9 (repeal of the Johnson Amendment). I respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider them.

I. Separation of church and state is a founding-era commitment that protects religion itself.

The Supreme Court now instructs that the Establishment Clause is to be interpreted "by reference to historical practices and understandings." Kennedy v. Bremerton School District, 597 U.S. 507, 535 (2022). Measured against that very standard, disestablishment is not a modern judicial invention. It is among the most deliberate commitments of the founding generation.

The Americans who ratified the First Amendment had lived under established churches and had seen what establishment produced: compelled tithes, penalized dissent, and a faith made dependent on the favor of magistrates. In Virginia, James Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments (1785) helped defeat a bill that would have taxed citizens to support Christian teachers, warning that establishment corrupts both church and state and that religion lies beyond the cognizance of civil government. The Commonwealth then enacted Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. Jefferson later described the First Amendment as building "a wall of separation between church and state." Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association (1802).

That "wall" was demanded not only by skeptics but by believers -- Baptists, Quakers, and other dissenters -- who understood that a church funded and directed by the state ceases to answer to conscience and begins to answer to power. Seventh-day Adventists inherited and have carried forward that same conviction. This is the deepest historical lesson of American disestablishment, and it cuts directly against the draft's framing: the separation of church and state is not hostility to faith. It is a protection that the devout and religious minorities secured for themselves.

II. Even after Kennedy, the Establishment Clause forbids the historical "hallmarks" of an establishment.

The draft (Recommendation 1) proposes executive-branch guidance "clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state." Any such guidance must begin from what the Clause still prohibits.

Kennedy set aside the Lemon test, but it did not repeal the Establishment Clause or reduce it to nothing. The Court reaffirmed that the Clause forbids the practices "the framers sought to prohibit," identifying coercion as "among the foremost hallmarks of religious establishments." 597 U.S. at 537. The founding-era hallmarks on which the Court's historical approach draws include government control over religious doctrine and personnel, compelled financial support of religion, government sponsorship of worship, and the use of religious institutions to perform civil functions. See Shurtleff v. City of Boston, 596 U.S. 243, 285-86 (2022) (Gorsuch, J., concurring in the judgment). And long before Kennedy, the Court explained that, to the Founders, an establishment "connoted sponsorship, financial support, and active involvement of the sovereign in religious activity." Walz v. Tax Comm'n, 397 U.S. 664, 668 (1970); see also Everson v. Board of Education, 330 U.S. 1, 15 (1947) (Establishment Clause bars laws that "aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another"); Town of Greece v. Galloway, 572 U.S. 565, 585 (2014) (government-sponsored proselytization would violate the Clause).

The point for the Commission is straightforward: a change in the test is not the abolition of the rule. Executive guidance that recasts "separation" as an antiquated error, or that treats every invocation of non-establishment as evidence of anti-religious "hostility," would misstate the law. The Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses are complementary guarantees; neither is a weapon against the other.

III. Recommendation 9 (repeal of the Johnson Amendment) should be withdrawn.

Of the draft's proposals, the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment most directly implicates the values the Establishment Clause protects, and I urge its removal.

The Johnson Amendment is a neutral, generally applicable condition on a public subsidy. Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code grants tax-exempt status -- and tax-deductible donations -- to charitable organizations on the condition that they refrain from intervening in political campaigns for or against candidates. That condition applies identically to secular charities,
foundations, universities, and houses of worship. It singles out no faith and burdens no belief: a church remains entirely free to preach on any moral question, to speak on legislation and public issues, and to form or fund a separate 501(c)(4) organization for political advocacy.

Repealing that condition for houses of worship would do two constitutionally significant things. First, it would channel a federal tax subsidy -- including tax-deductible contributions -- into partisan electioneering conducted by religious institutions: precisely the "financial support" of religious activity that the historical hallmarks identify as a mark of establishment, now compounded by government entanglement in tax-favored campaign speech delivered from the pulpit. Second, it would invite the corruption of religious institutions themselves. When a congregation's tax status becomes a partisan asset, clergy become targets of political solicitation, houses of worship become conduits for campaign money, and the independence of the pulpit -- the very thing free exercise protects -- is placed at the disposal of candidates and parties. That is Madison's warning in modern form.

It is also worth noting where the law now stands. The recent effort to dismantle the Johnson Amendment through litigation did not succeed: after the Internal Revenue Service proposed a consent judgment in the National Religious Broadcasters litigation, the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Texas declined to approve it and dismissed the suit, leaving the
statute fully intact. The Commission's recommendation therefore asks the political branches to accomplish by legislation what the judiciary has declined to do. That is a reason for caution, not haste -- particularly given that large majorities of Americans, and of faith leaders themselves, have long favored keeping houses of worship out of partisan campaigns.

IV. The final report should reaffirm that non-establishment and free exercise are mutually reinforcing.

The draft's animating premise -- that Americans of faith deserve full and equal participation in public life, free from coercion, ridicule, or official disfavor -- is one I share. That premise is best served by a final report that treats the Establishment Clause not as an obstacle to religious liberty but as one of its guarantees. I respectfully recommend that the Commission:

1. Reframe Recommendation 1 so that any executive guidance affirms, rather than narrows, the Establishment Clause's prohibition on government sponsorship, funding, favoritism, and coercion, and recognizes that the separation of church and state secures free exercise for all;

2. Withdraw Recommendation 9, and instead affirm the Johnson Amendment as a neutral, generally applicable protection of both electoral integrity and the independence of religious institutions; and

3. Ensure that the report's protections for religious expression are stated in denominationally neutral terms that extend equally to every faith -- including minority and Sabbatarian believers -- and to the nonreligious, consistent with the equal-liberty principle at the heart of both Religion Clauses.

Genuine religious liberty and a government that neither establishes nor funds religion are not competing goals. They are, and have been since the founding, the same commitment seen from two sides. It is a commitment my own faith has defended for generations, and I ask the Commission to defend it now. I thank the Commission for the opportunity to comment.

Respectfully submitted,

Nelly Sinclair
Member, Seventh-day Adventist Church
Submitted in an individual capacity.

From: Bisbee Seventh-day Adventist Church <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 18:27:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

We, the members of the Bisbee Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in Bisbee, Arizona, respectfully wish to convey our strong objection to the proposal of The Heritage Foundation, that would destroy the historical separation of church and state. These are opposite sides of the same coin, wherein both play a role in the preservation of freedom of religion and liberty of conscience. Americans must not be deceived into thinking that morality can be legislated or coerced. Please keep the people of faith safe from the tyranny of state-endorsed/enforced religion. Please reject all attempts to establish any religion. Render unto the State what pertains to the State and unto God what pertains to God.

Sincerely for religious liberty and the continued separation of Church and State,

Bisbee SDA Church Board

From: Barbara Varro <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 18:55:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am writing to reject 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.
As a student of history, and seeing how in the Middle Ages (often referred to as the "Dark Ages) the Church came to not just be one side of a bridge, it dominated society resulting in the travesty of persecuting those who did not believe as the official State Church believed.
The largest denomination in the world, the Catholic Church, once was party of such a bridge and even today denies that individuals should have freedom of conscience. To have the US government sanction such a bridge will only lead to lack of individual freedom to worship God according to their own conscience, and usher in persecution. For instance, as a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe God ordained the seventh day as Sabbath, as the day upon which to rest. He even later in Scripture he refers to the Sabbath as a sign that He sanctifies His people.
On the other hand, the Catholic Church lauds the fact that she took the authority upon herself to change the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day, to Sunday, the first day. Even now the Catholic Church in its literature and practice is urging Sunday as a day of rest "for the earth." It is just a small step from this to urging Congress to upend the Constitutional guarantees about freedom of worship and making laws that US Citizens shall all worship on Sunday. But no one should be surprised by this, because the prophet Daniel prophesied that there would arise a power that would "think to change times and laws, which obviously the Catholic Church has done, and even has accused Protestants of not really believing in "the Bible only' since most Protestants do keep Sunday as Sabbath. My concern is my ability and the ability of my church and my children to have freedom granted by the USA, to worship on the true Biblical Sabbath if they choose to do so.
Please DO NOT SUPPORT building a bridge between Church and State!!
Respectfully,
Barbara Varro

From: steven grabiner <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – STEVEN Grabiner
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 19:04:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

My name is Steven Grabiner, and I am writing as a citizen who cares deeply that this Commission protect both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses together. I ask you to consider three arguments that, taken together, should shape how you think about any proposal touching religion and government.

First, rights come from the Creator, not from majorities, and this changes everything about how a commission should weigh popular support for religious measures. If a vote can grant religious liberty, a vote can take it away, and what can be taken away by ballot was never really a right, only a permission. As one old tract on the limits of civil authority put it, a right is something inherent in the one possessing it, independent of the will of all other persons. That same tract observed that man's first and highest allegiance is due to his Creator, so the domain of conscience is one which human government has no right to invade. Popular governments exist to protect the minority, not merely to execute the will of the many, since the majority can already look after itself at the ballot box. When Senator Blair argued that most Americans wanted Sunday legislation, Jones answered that the people, however many there are, have no right to invade another's relationship to God. Even a congressional committee once affirmed that the Constitution regards the conscience of a solitary individual as sacred as that of a whole community. Whatever a survey or a majority favors today, that fact alone cannot justify religious legislation, because religion was never among the things submitted to the vote.

Second, religion is non-delegable, so government never received authority over it in the first place. American government rests on the premise that just powers come from the consent of the governed, meaning powers the people delegate. But no person can delegate his relationship to God; a man can authorize another to manage his property, but not to believe or worship in his place. As Jones argued, since it is impossible for anyone to delegate power in things religious, the Declaration of Independence logically excludes religion from the jurisdiction of every government resulting from it. No government can ever account to God for any individual, and no government will stand at the judgment seat to answer even for itself. This means the First Amendment did not invent this boundary; it only recorded a limit that was already there.

Third, history shows what happens when sincere majorities enforce religion anyway. Salem's judges were devout and certain, yet, as J. H. Waggoner wrote, they verily thought they were doing God service, but stand condemned for their folly and for the violence done to the plainest principles of morality. Two centuries later, in 1892, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers, one sixty-two years old, and marched them through the streets of Paris, Tennessee, for quietly plowing on Sunday after resting Saturday, while trainloads of workmen passed the jail every Sunday undisturbed. The lesson is not that these men were insincere but that sincerity never limits machinery once built. As the old tract asked, is not fining and imprisoning Adventists for disregarding a Sunday law as truly persecution for conscience's sake as the whipping of Baptists two centuries earlier for disregarding infant baptism laws? If not, why not?

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

Respectfully,
Steven Grabiner

From: Eden Grace <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty and Freedom of Conscience – A Seventh-day Adventist Christian
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 19:34:08 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Response.pdf

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

Please find attached my public comment regarding the Commission's draft report.

Respectfully,

A Seventh-day Adventist Christian

July 12, 2026

Re: Public Comment on the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Commission's draft report. I appreciate your willingness to examine one of America's most cherished freedoms—the liberty of conscience and the free exercise of religion. As an American citizen and a lifelong Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I am grateful that our nation continues to recognize the importance of protecting the fundamental right to worship according to one's convictions.

My comments come from the perspective of a faith community whose history has been deeply intertwined with the defense of religious liberty. For nearly 140 years, Seventh-day Adventists have been active advocates for religious liberty, not because we seek special privileges for ourselves, but because we believe religious liberty reflects the very character of God.

For many, religious liberty begins with the Constitution. For Christians, I believe it begins much earlier. It begins in the Garden of Eden. The opening chapters of Scripture reveal a remarkable truth about God's government. God created human beings with the genuine freedom to choose whether they would love and obey Him. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not a flaw in creation but evidence that love cannot exist without freedom. From the beginning, God chose persuasion over coercion.

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly invites, rather than compels. Joshua appealed to Israel, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Moses urged the people, "I have set before you life and death... therefore choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Jesus stood at the door and knocked rather than forcing His way in (Revelation 3:20). Even when the rich young ruler walked away from Him, Christ did not compel him to return.

These passages reveal something profound about God's character. The Creator of the universe possesses unlimited power, yet He refuses to force worship. He governs through truth, love, patience, and invitation.

This principle is foundational to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Lucifer challenged God's character and government, accusing Him of injustice and arbitrary authority. God could have immediately destroyed the rebellion. Instead, He permitted the controversy to unfold before the universe because genuine loyalty cannot be produced by force. Truth never fears examination. Love never depends upon coercion.

Ellen G. White expressed this principle beautifully when she said, "The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God's government" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22). That single sentence captures why religious liberty is so precious to my church. We believe that civil governments should not exercise authority over conscience because God Himself does not

compel worship. Each person must ultimately answer to God—not the state—for their religious convictions.

This conviction has shaped the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. During the nineteenth century, when Sunday laws were proposed in various parts of the United States, Adventists opposed them—not because we opposed Christianity or desired to diminish the influence of faith in public life—but because we believed the state should never compel religious observance. Our defense of liberty was never limited to ourselves. Adventists have consistently advocated for the religious rights of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, atheists, and people of every faith because liberty of conscience is universal. If a principle protects only those with whom we agree, it is not true religious liberty.

The New Testament reinforces this distinction between the authority of God and the authority of civil government. Jesus declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). His kingdom, He explained, "is not of this world" (John 18:36). Civil government has an important God-ordained responsibility to preserve order, administer justice, and protect the rights of its citizens, but it should never assume authority over the conscience.

From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation offer solemn warnings about the dangers that arise when civil authority attempts to govern matters of faith and conscience. In Daniel 3, the state commanded an act of worship and threatened death for noncompliance; in Daniel 6, the state prohibited prayer according to an individual's religious convictions. In both cases, faithful believers respected civil authority until its demands intruded upon their duty to God. Revelation 13 carries this same conflict forward prophetically, portraying a time when civil power is again used to enforce religious worship and punish those who refuse to comply. These passages illustrate a consistent biblical principle: government exceeds its proper authority when it seeks to either compel worship or to prohibit the free exercise of religion. History likewise demonstrates that when civil and religious authority become intertwined, freedom of conscience is endangered. The church's spiritual mission is weakened when it relies upon the coercive power of the state rather than upon the power of truth, love, and the Holy Spirit.

For this reason, I encourage the Commission to affirm not only the importance of protecting religious expression but also the equally important principle that government must remain neutral among competing religious convictions. Government best protects religion when it neither establishes nor inhibits it. A government that protects the conscience of every citizen—including those whose beliefs differ from our own—is acting consistently with both the Constitution and the biblical principle of freedom.

As Christians, we should have confidence that truth does not require governmental enforcement. The gospel advances through conviction, not coercion. Christ calls hearts through love, not legislation. The Holy Spirit accomplishes what civil authority never can.

In today's increasingly polarized culture, it can be tempting for people of faith to seek governmental power to enforce religious values. History urges caution. Whenever Christianity

has relied upon civil authority to accomplish spiritual purposes, both religion and liberty have suffered. The strength of Christianity has never been found in political power but in the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

My church's history reminds us that religious and political majorities can change, but the principle of liberty of conscience must remain constant. The religious freedom we defend for those whose beliefs differ from our own is the same freedom that protects each of us. Religious liberty is therefore not merely a legal principle; it is an expression of Christian love and humility. We defend another person's freedom because we recognize that every human being bears the image of God and must ultimately answer to Him according to the dictates of conscience.

As you finalize your report, I respectfully encourage the Commission to continue emphasizing protections for the free exercise of religion while also recognizing that authentic religious liberty includes the freedom not to be coerced in matters of faith. Such liberty reflects both America's highest constitutional ideals and the character of the God who grants every person the freedom to choose.

Thank you for your service to our nation and for considering these comments.

Respectfully,

A Seventh-day Adventist Christian

Florida

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] The President's Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 19:36:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

The first amendment exists so that one religion will not use the powers of the state to persecute minority religions. This is the purpose of the first amendment to have a separation between church and State.

My concern as a seventh day Adventist is that as a minority religion in this country, I would be more likely to be persecuted for worshipping on Saturday if this wall of separation between church and state is abolished.

Please reconsider this egregious proposal to eliminate the only protection for liberty of conscience that exists in the constitution.

Sincerely,

George Decker

Sent from my iPhone

From: Mary Ellen Neslund <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Mary Ellen Neslund
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 19:47:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian,

1. I object to the funding of religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.

2. I also object to the funding of non-profit activities.

3. I agree with the Johnson Amendment, that restricts church's political activities, and do not want to see it, the Johnson Amendment repealed.

4. I request the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

I value the same reasons our forefathers fled to this country, to worship in peace and safety.

Sincerely,
Mary Ellen Neslund

From: "tlcampman (null)" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Trenda Campman
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 19:48:22 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was surprised to hear that the commission wants to weaken the wall of separation between church and state - particularly in regards to using government money to fund religious nonprofit activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment. I find this alarming as a person of faith. The Seventh Day Adventist church, which I belong to, has a history of fighting for religious freedom and the separation of church and state.

I object to the following;

1. Funding religious non-profit activities.

2. Funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.

3. To repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts churches political activities.

4. Special treatment given Jewish people and the state of Israel.

I request the following:

1. Complete separation of church and state.

2. The Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

3. Complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.

People of faith built the separation of church and state to protect faith. That's the reason religion has stayed so strong here. It was not a secular idea. Please keep the separation of church and state.

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

Sincerely,

Trenda Campman

San Diego, California

From: Becky Garber <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fw: Public comment on the draft report of "Presidential Religious Liberty Commission" Rebecca I. Garber.
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:03:24 -0400
Importance: Normal

I'm writing in support of Jonathan Zirkle, PILLAR OF FREEDOM. I am a Seventh-day Adventist and observe the Sabbath of the Bible, Genesis 2:1 and Exodus 20:8-11.

Jesus declared a separation of what belongs to the government and what belongs to God.

Matthew 22:17-21. Verse 21 makes it plain: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Rebecca I. Garber
Leesburg, FL

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: Wanes Joab <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Please Separate Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:16:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I write with deep respect and appreciation for your service in protecting religious liberty.

I am currently in Guam and previously served as a pastor in Yap for six years. Throughout my ministry, I have believed that faith must always be a matter of personal conviction, never coercion. God does not force allegiance—He invites it. Jesus stands at the door and knocks; He does not force His way in (Revelation 3:20). God respects freedom of conscience, and I believe we should do the same.
For this reason, I respectfully ask that you preserve the separation of church and state and continue to protect the freedom of every person to worship according to conscience.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully,

Pastor Wanes Joab
Yap Seventh-day Adventist Church

From: Bill Bixby <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Bill Bixby
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:17:08 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I believe that there should be separation of church and state.

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments and request that you please implement them.

Thank you for your consideration

Bill Bixby

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

[redacted]

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

DOJ-RLC Comment-020101

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

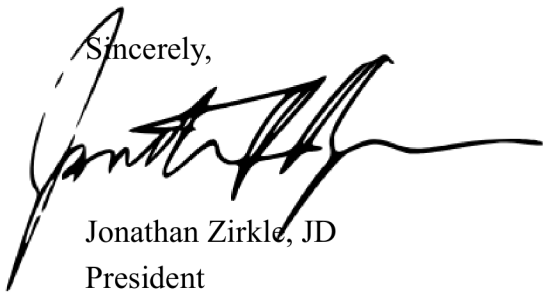
[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020102

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

DOJ-RLC Comment-020103

From: David Sitler <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendation of Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:32:11 -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.

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 Seventh-day Adventist 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,

David J. Sitler

[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: Jodi Baze <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:33:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I was troubled to hear the news that the Religious Liberty commission has made a decision to replace separation of church and state with a “bridge.” As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I am writing to you to respectfully ask you to reconsider this proposition.

The separation of church and state was established to preserve religious liberty for everyone, regardless of beliefs or lack thereof. This “bridge” will very likely lead to allowing government leaders (of various faiths and beliefs) to have authority over our churches and religious schools. As a Bible-believing Christian I believe that I should be subject to government authorities. However when it comes to our faith practices, I must obey God rather than man. This country was founded upon freedom of religion by those who had experienced torture and persecution from countries where this “wall of separation” was not put in place.

I am asking you to protect those of all faiths by allowing our religious institutions to be completely separate from state governments, and by giving those of no faith the freedom to make that decision.

Sincerely,
Jodi Baze from Illinois

P.S.

Dr. Carson, thank you for taking the time to speak with my students many years ago. I appreciate your support of Adventist Education.

Blessings to you all.

From: Teresa Hebard <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Concern with Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report – Teresa Hebard
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:37:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I am concerned with some of the conclusions and recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report. I agree that religious liberty is one of the foundational principles that sets America apart from all other nations and the primary source of its greatness.

I feel there are 2 problematic recommendations in the report:
1. Reframing the Establishment Clause.
2. Repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When the Blair Sunday-Rest Bill came before Congress in 1888, Seventh-day Adventists stood nearly alone in opposition to the bill. The Establishment Clause does not exist to protect the government from religion, or even primarily to protect majorities. It exists to protect the minorities.

Religious liberty is strongest when the government remains strictly neutral – neither hostile to faith nor entangled with it. To ensure all Americans' freedoms, we need to hold firm to the protections of the Establishment Clause's separation principle and to the guardrails of the Johnson Amendment.

The wall of separation of powers was built by believers to keep the church free. Please do not weaken or dismantle this wall that has afforded protection to Americans throughout its history. America is the last great bastion of freedom.

Thank you for considering of these matters of vital importance to the future of our nation.

Sincerely,
Teresa Hebard
Sunnyside, WA

From: Jim Hebard <[redacted]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Concern with Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report – Jim Hebard

Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:38:08 -0400

Importance: Normal

Attachments: Pillar_of_Freedom's_Response_to_Presidential_Commission_on_Religious_Liberty_Draft_Report.pdf

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Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a citizen of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. I am very concerned with the conclusions and recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report. Because I may not be able to personally express my concerns as eloquently as others, I have gone online and found a very well-written response by Pillar of Freedom that I agree with and have attached to this email as a reference.

I completely agree with the concerns expressed in the attached Pillar of Freedom Response and I strongly request that you implement all of them. I am especially concerned about the Presidential Commission's effort to weaken and dismantle the Separation of Church and State, using government money to fund religious activities, and any effort to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

Sincerely,
Jim Hebard
Sunnyside, WA

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

[redacted]

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

DOJ-RLC Comment-020120

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

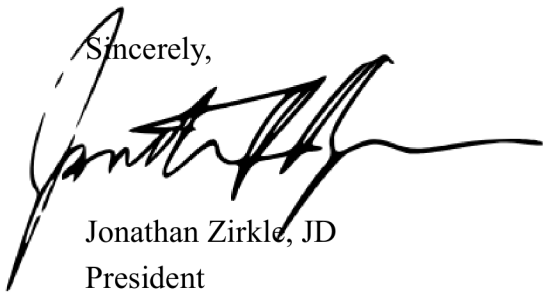
[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020121

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020122

From: Sheila Adams <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:39:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

I'm a Seventh Day Adventist and I believe in the separate of church and state. I don't want the government telling me how and what religion to follow. I believe that is between me and God. My choice not the government. Isn't that why America was founded to escape the religious persecution from Europe.

Thank you

From: Fanfilled Music <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:41:05 -0400
Importance: Normal

Good evening ladies and gentlemen of the RLC,

My name is Matt Thomas. I am a veteran of the armed forces, and a Seventh-Day Adventist Protestant Christian. I believe in religious liberty, and liberty of conscience. Our Creator endowed us with many inalienable rights (such as the ones above). I believe that Christianity has unjustly come under attack by those who do not like any display of Christianity in the public sphere. We must protect individual right to worship as one sees fit, so long as that does not inflict physical harm upon another person, or trample on another person's rights.

However, there is can be a fine line between protecting a religion, and promoting it on the governmental level. Many who claim to be Christians wish to see the wall separating church and state come down, and they do not believe our founding fathers truly wanted the church to be separate from the state. However, if we read what a few of them had to say, we will get a better picture and of how they viewed the issue.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1802:

"Gentlemen

The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as 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, & 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 & 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. 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 to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection & blessing of the common father and creator of man, and tender you for yourselves & your religious association, assurances of my high respect & esteem."

George Washington gave the following quote in a speech in 1790:

"The citizens of the United States of America, have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy—a policy worthy of imitation.—ALL possess alike liberty of conscience, and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction—to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."

Benjamin Franklin said the following in his closing speech at the Constitutional Convention on 1787:

"Most Men indeed as well as most Sects in Religion, think themselves in Possession of all Truth, and that wherever others differ from them it is so far Error. [Sir Richard] Steele, a Protestant, in a Dedication tells the Pope, that the only Difference between our two Churches in their Opinions of the Certainty of their Doctrine, is, the Romish Church is infallible, and the Church of England is never in the Wrong. But tho' many private Persons think almost as highly of their own Infallibility, as that of their Sect, few express it so naturally as a certain French lady, who in a little Dispute with her Sister, said, I don't know how it happens, Sister, but I meet with no body but myself that's always in the right."

As you all are well aware, the majority of our founding fathers had differing opinions on the separation of church and state, but while many of them were deeply religious themselves, they definitively believed that the government should protect different faiths and religions, not dictate or discriminate for or against any particular religion. I personally believed that the Creator God—who created the heavens, the earth, and all living things—is more than capable of changing hearts and minds and bringing morality back in the United States. True faith in God cannot be forced.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to our feedback and thoughts on this important issue. I pray that God blesses you all.

Respectfully, Matt Thomas

From: Don Mercer <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - separation of church and state - Donald Mercer
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:44:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a person of faith (Commandment keeping seventh-day Adventist) I am deeply concerned at the consideration Of a bridge between church and state. My family came to America for religious freedom because America had separation of church and state. Without separation of church and state, persecution, coercion, Fines, penalties, prison, and death will follow as history has shown us so many times. If we don't know our history, we will repeat it. Look no further than the dark ages, and you will find your example of building a bridge between church and state. Over 100 million people were burned at the stake, Decapitated, stretched in half, filleted, tortured in every imagination because they would not consent to the religion of the state. When the government starts funding religion, Count on it, this is the result. Our fore fathers knew what they were protecting us from by separating church and state, It was for freedom, freedom for all churches and their beliefs, and all people whether they wanted to believe or not. Christ gave us an example by not forcing religion on us, but rather letting us choose it as a free gift. Do you not know your history? Separation of church and state was the answer to religious persecution.

From: Jair Mendes <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Strong Opposition to Weakening the Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:56:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I am writing as an American citizen, a Christian, and a strong supporter of religious liberty to express my firm opposition to any recommendation that weakens, dismisses, or tears down the separation of church and state.

The separation of church and state is not hostility toward Christianity. It is one of the strongest protections Christianity and every other faith possess. It protects the church from government interference, protects the government from ecclesiastical control, and safeguards every person's God-given freedom of conscience.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when religious institutions unite with civil government, liberty is soon endangered. The result is not a purer church or a more righteous nation. The result is political corruption within religion, religious coercion through civil power, and eventually the persecution of those who dissent from the beliefs favored by the state.

Christ never commissioned His church to obtain political power in order to compel religious belief or observance. He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." The things that belong to God, including worship, faith, conscience, and religious conviction, must never be placed under the control of Caesar.

True religion cannot be produced by legislation. Faith cannot be compelled by government. Worship obtained through political pressure is not worship, and religious conformity enforced by civil authority is not Christianity.

The early history of America should warn us against dismantling this safeguard. Many who came to this land were fleeing religious persecution carried out by governments acting together with established churches. Baptists, Quakers, and other dissenters endured fines, imprisonment, beatings, banishment, and death because civil authorities attempted to enforce religious uniformity.

The founders understood that danger. James Madison warned that it is proper to take alarm at the first experiment upon our liberties. Thomas Jefferson spoke of a wall of separation between church and state. Roger Williams defended liberty of conscience because he understood that the civil magistrate has no rightful authority over a person's faith or worship.

These principles did not arise from hostility toward God. Many of their strongest defenders were people of sincere religious conviction who wanted to protect the church from corruption and protect the conscience from coercion.

I am especially concerned by efforts to portray the separation of church and state as constitutionally baseless or as an obstacle to religious freedom. Properly understood, separation does not remove religious people from public life. Christians should be free to speak, vote, serve, preach, publish, assemble, and advocate according to conscience. But the church itself must not be joined to the machinery of government, and government must not be used to establish, favor, finance, or enforce religious doctrine.

There is an essential difference between protecting the free exercise of religion and granting religious institutions governmental power or political privilege.

I also oppose efforts to transform churches into instruments of partisan political campaigns. The church has a moral responsibility to address sin, righteousness, justice, mercy, family, life, religious liberty, and other matters of biblical principle. But endorsing political candidates, trading congregational influence for political favors, and becoming financially dependent upon government will compromise the church's mission.

Government money will inevitably bring government influence and government control. Churches that become dependent upon public funding may eventually be pressured to alter their teachings, practices, hiring, education, or ministry in order to remain eligible for that support. What government subsidizes, government will eventually seek to regulate.

The church should depend upon God and the voluntary support of believers, not upon political patronage.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I am particularly conscious of the danger of religious legislation. A religious majority may initially believe that civil power will be used to advance values it supports. But once the principle is accepted that government may enforce religious observance, the same power can be used against minority faiths, dissenting Christians, Jews, Muslims, nonbelievers, and anyone whose conscience differs from the dominant religious coalition.

The question is not merely whether the government will promote religion. The unavoidable question is: Which religion, which doctrines, which commandments, which day of worship, and whose interpretation will receive the power of the state?

No church should desire that authority, because no church can guarantee that it will always control it.

Religious liberty must apply equally to everyone. It must protect the Christian, the Jew, the Muslim, the atheist, the minority believer, and the person whose conscience stands alone against the majority. Otherwise, it is not religious liberty. It is religious preference enforced by political power.

I therefore respectfully urge the Commission to reject any recommendation that denies, weakens, or seeks to dismantle the separation of church and state. I also urge the Commission to oppose policies that would:

1. Place churches and religious ministries in financial dependence upon government.
2. Encourage churches to become partisan political organizations.
3. Permit civil authorities to decide religious doctrine or religious observance.
4. Use public schools or government institutions to promote one religious interpretation over another.
5. Present the constitutional separation of church and state as an enemy of faith.

Religious freedom is preserved not when church and state unite, but when both remain within their proper spheres.

The church must remain free to proclaim truth, persuade the conscience, serve humanity, and worship God without government interference. The state must protect every person’s civil rights without attempting to direct religious belief or practice.

Please do not tear down the wall that has protected both religion and liberty. Once ecclesiastical power and civil authority are joined, history tells us what follows: political corruption, religious control, suppression of dissent, and persecution.

America should not have to learn that terrible lesson again.

Respectfully,

Jair Mendes

From: Teresa Hebard <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: PUBLIC COMMENT – Concern with Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report – Teresa Hebard
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 20:58:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 12, 2026, at 5:37 PM, Teresa Hebard <[redacted]> wrote:

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I am concerned with some of the conclusions and recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report. I agree that religious liberty is one of the foundational principles that sets America apart from all other nations and the primary source of its greatness.

I feel there are 2 problematic recommendations in the report:
1. Reframing the Establishment Clause.
2. Repealing the Johnson Amendment.

When the Blair Sunday-Rest Bill came before Congress in 1888, Seventh-day Adventists stood nearly alone in opposition to the bill. The Establishment Clause does not exist to protect the government from religion, or even primarily to protect majorities. It exists to protect the minorities.

Religious liberty is strongest when the government remains strictly neutral – neither hostile to faith nor entangled with it. To ensure all Americans' freedoms, we need to hold firm to the protections of the Establishment Clause's separation principle and to the guardrails of the Johnson Amendment.

The wall of separation of powers was built by believers to keep the church free. Please do not weaken or dismantle this wall that has afforded protection to Americans throughout its history. America is the last great bastion of freedom.

Thank you for considering of these matters of vital importance to the future of our nation.

Sincerely,
Teresa Hebard
Sunnyside, WA

From: Justin Burch <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Draft Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:03:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for providing the public an opportunity to comment on the draft Religious Liberty Commission Report. As a Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist, I strongly support genuine religious liberty, including the right of every person to worship, speak, assemble, observe religious holy days, and live according to conscience without discrimination or government coercion.

I appreciate many of the report's efforts to protect religious expression and accommodation. No student, employee, service member, chaplain, or other citizen should be penalized merely for sincerely practicing his or her faith. Religious liberty must protect Christians, Jews, Muslims, members of minority faiths, and those who profess no religious faith.

However, I am deeply concerned by the report's description of religious liberty as a "bridge between church and state" and its assertion that church and state "strengthen and support one another." These statements appear to go beyond protecting the free exercise of religion and suggest a cooperative relationship between government and religious institutions.

Government should protect religious exercise, but it should not promote, direct, favor, or partner with religion. The distinction is essential. When the government moves from protecting faith to supporting or advancing it, the beliefs of the religious majority can easily receive preference over minority beliefs.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I belong to a Christian tradition with a long history of defending freedom of conscience and opposing government enforcement of religious practices. History demonstrates that government involvement in religion can initially appear beneficial to believers while eventually threatening those whose convictions differ from the majority. Religious liberty is safest when the government protects every person's conscience without attempting to define, sponsor, or use religion for political or national purposes.

I am also concerned by recommendations that could draw churches more deeply into partisan politics. Houses of worship should be free to teach moral and biblical principles, but they should not become political instruments or extensions of the state. Political power can corrupt religious institutions just as religious power can be used to coerce citizens.

I respectfully request that the Commission:

1. Remove or substantially revise the language suggesting that church and state should strengthen and support one another.
2. Clearly affirm that civil government must remain institutionally neutral toward religion while protecting the free exercise rights of all people.
3. Ensure that every recommendation protects minority faiths, religious dissenters, and nonreligious citizens equally.
4. Reject policies that would permit the government to favor the religious beliefs or practices of the majority.
5. Preserve strong protections for Sabbath observance, religious holy days, conscientious objections, and other sincere religious practices.
6. Avoid encouraging partisan political entanglement by churches and religious organizations.

Religious liberty does not require the exclusion of religious people from public life. People of faith should be free to speak, serve, vote, pray, and participate fully in society. But the government itself must neither establish nor advance religion. Its proper role is to protect the conscience of every person—not to build an institutional partnership between civil authority and religious power.

Please revise the final report to make this distinction unmistakably clear.

Respectfully,

Justin Burch
Washington State

From: Brandi Harris <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -Separation of Church and State -Brandi Harris
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:17:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I respectfully disagree with Church and State coming together. It is certainly disheartening to read that the Commission wants to build a "bridge" with the Church and State. They are separate for a reason.

If Church and State are brought together this will mean that the Government can enforce things upon me and my family as believers of Christ Jesus and members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church that are against our religious freedoms. We worship God on the Bible Sabbath, but I'd be against a "law" that would say ALL humans have to rest and worship on Saturday. That is enforcement and taking away of one's religious freedom.

The God of Heaven gave each and every human being the free will choice and if this "bridge" brings Church and State together, this will in fact, lead to taking away our freedom of conscious. Our Heavenly Father doesn't force worship, but allows us to make that choice in our worship to Him. Every human being has that free will choice to worship whom they may, but if the Creator of the Universe isn't forcing His hand to worship Him only, then how is it the right of the Government to decide this for us?

America is a nation known for freedoms, Religious Liberty being one of those. Again, the God of Heaven has given ALL humans the free will choice of worship, but now it seems to be in process to be taken away from ALL humans.

I am not a theologian, and far from a politician, thus, this letter may not sound as elequoent as some letters you're receiving, but I know religious expression should be protected and that's by keeping Church and State separate.

Sincerely,

Brandi Harris
Lincoln, Maine

From: Valerie Pherson <valpherson@icloud.com>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:25:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

I believe in Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them. I believe we will lose our freedoms if we don't keep church and state separated. I believe in freedom of conscience for every person. I am a Seventh Day Adventist Christian and do not want the government to control what I believe or any other Christian believes.
Valerie Pherson
Sent from my iPhone

From: Emeka Nwankpah <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Cc: Margarett Nwankpah <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Maintaining the Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:29:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.

As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.*" Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.

Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.

Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter.

Sincerely,

Emeka & Margarett Nwankpah

[redacted]

From: "Reeves, Joe" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Joe Reeves
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:34:39 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: img-50b00633-99b5-4bb0-8ef3-c3c92c2e266c.png

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a grateful citizen of the United States, ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and editor of inVerse Bible study guide for young adults (inversebible.org). 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. Jesus refrained from using force because He taught, "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!

Joe Reeves
Asst. Director / inVerse Editor
GC Sabbath School Personal Ministries Dept.

Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters
Office [redacted] Mobile [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] • InVerseBible.org • SabbathSchoolPersonalMinistries.org

From: Conrad Vine <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Conrad Vine
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:35:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

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

In 2007, I immigrated legally to the USA. I was British by birth, but am American by choice. As a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, a committed disciple of Jesus Christ, and an ordained minister of the Gospel, I am also saved by grace.

I count it one of the greatest honors of my life to have become a US citizen, and am committed to contributing as a productive and law-abiding citizen to the ongoing success of our constitutional republic. Having lived and worked in dozens of countries worldwide, I consider the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, to be the finest system of human governance ever seen in human history. Simply put, becoming an American citizen was one of the greatest privileges of my life.

For over 250 years, the USA has been the primary beacon of liberty for oppressed peoples all around the world. The 1st Amendment of the US Bill of Rights, and in particular the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses, have been the ultimate backstop for liberty of conscience, freedom of and from religion, and the ability to think and speak freely, for oppressed persons and communities around the world. My family are living proof that the "American Dream" is alive and well, even today.

I share my concerns as someone with a deep background in, and understanding of, the bitter wars of religion that tore the European continent apart for so many centuries, and out of which the USA arose.

I came to the USA from the UK. The UK fought a bitter civil war in the 1640s, between King and Parliament, over the alleged divine right of kings to rule without regards to their subjects or their God-given rights. At the same time the Calvinist Pilgrim Fathers came to the USA (1620), the mainland of Europe was engulfed in one of the most destructive wars in history, the Thirty Year War, a war between Lutheran and Catholic states, in which liberty of conscience, and the ability to worship God freely, was one of the core issues of contention. During that war, neither side gave liberty to Calvinists, hence the (Calvinist) Pilgrim Fathers fled to the New World. It is estimated that the Thirty Year War, involving the nations of Germany, France, Spain, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, and mercenary armies from across the European continent, led to the death of up to 60% of entire regions of Europe and an economic malaise for decades.

Much in the spirit of the times in which they lived, the (Calvinist) Pilgrim Fathers' vision however was not of religious or political liberty. Their vision for the New World is best captured in John Winthrop's famous sermon in 1630, as he was about to flee England for Boston (MA) entitled "*A Model of Christian Charity."* For Winthrop, the Bay Colony was to be the heart of an authoritative and theocentric state, in which the state magistrates enforced the decisions of the Puritan clergy.

The most famous line of Winthrop to the huddled Puritans on the flagship Arabella was this: "*For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us."* The Bay

Colony was indeed theocentric, autocratic and authoritative. Dissent was ruthlessly squashed, by physical punishment, banishment to the wilderness, or deportation back to England.

In 1631, Roger Williams (also a Puritan) arrived in Boston. He immediately offended the Bay Colony leaders by turning down a prestigious pastoral role, preferring to settle in Salem, a few miles north of the Colony. As he witnessed the tragic persecution of dissenters by the same Puritans who had fled to the New World to avoid persecution, he started to advocate privately for a separation of church and state, and rejected the Puritans' concept that they could fuse their Puritan faith with civil government.

For this he paid a heavy price, being forced to flee in mid-winter (1636) to establish modern-day Rhode Island (RI). A trusted friend of the Narragansett nation, Williams purchased the land of modern-day Providence (RI) and established it as a refuge for all who wished to live with freedom of conscience.

The surrounding colonies all made repeated attempts, to destroy the new colony, but after repeated trips to London, Williams secured the Charter for RI from both Oliver Cromwell and then from Charles II. "*No person within the said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called into question, for any differences in opinion, in matters of religion, who do not actually disturb the civil peace of Our said colony….the form of government established is Democratical."* Rhode Island became the first US colony to be explicitly democrat in its governance, and shortly thereafter banned slavery within its boundaries.

Williams argued that conscience is to be considered inviolable because it is man's path to God and because it is an inalienable aspect of being human. To violate conscience, therefore, is to violate God's work and man's inherent dignity of being created in God's image. Denial of conscience is thus a denial of religious liberty.

To uphold religious liberty is to honor, respect and uphold the conscience of our brothers and sisters. As all people have equal access to conscience, this naturally resulted in the need for tolerance, to respect the conscience of all, regardless of their faith, be they Protestant, Catholic, Turk, Jew or Native American. Thus the modern concept of tolerance in society comes from a Protestant worldview, not from a secular worldview.

To protect conscience, Williams argued for the complete separation of Church and State in his most famous work, *The Bloody Tenent, of Persecution, For Cause of Conscience* published in London in 1644, at the height of the English civil war.

In response to Cotton, a famous Puritan preacher in the Bay Colony who challenged his ideas, he wrote "*Cotton's Letter Examined"* in 1644, stating that, *"When they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall itself, removed the candlestick, and made His garden a wilderness, as at this day. And that therefore if He will ever please to restore His garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be walled in peculiarly unto Himself from the world; and that all that shall be saved out of the world are to be transplanted out of the wilderness of the world, and added unto His church or garden."*

And Williams' legacy today? He became a Baptist minister, and the Baptists fought hard for religious liberty in the 13 pre-revolutionary colonies, all of which had an official state church, e.g. Episcopalian in Virginia. John Leland, a famous Baptist preacher, faced intense persecution, but he upheld Roger Williams' vision of a separation of Church and State, and he heavily influenced both Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, two of our leading Founding Fathers.

Rejecting the Puritans' push for an autocratic and persecuting union of church and state (the infamous "*City upon a hill*" concept), the Framers of the US Constitution drew heavily upon Williams' teachings of the need for the complete separation of church and state, for tolerance and respect for the

convictions of others, for freedom to worship or not worship according to one's conscience, and of "*soul libertie*," the idea that no person was to be condemned for the convictions their mind, or for expressing those convictions in public. Thus was born the Establishment Clause and the Free-Exercise Clause of the Bill of Rights.

American history has been tumultuous. Out of terrible injustices, such as chattel slavery and Jim Crow, we have slowly found ways to transcend our differences, little by little, year by year, listening and learning so that that all our citizens may experience in the fullest way possible the inalienable rights given us by our Creator, as enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Our journey over the centuries has been messy, but the aspiration of every human heart for liberty of conscience, for freedom of religion, to speak and think and dream freely, and to be treated according to the content of their character rather than their color or confession, has found its fullest expression in our American experiment rather than in any other nation in human history.

We still strive from generation to generation for an ever more perfect union. But America has never experienced the bitter hatred, the ideological mass slaughter of civilians, or the social collapse caused by wars of religion. Europe has. And Europe has paid a bitter price over the centuries from the many attempts by governments and dominant religious groups to bridge the gap between Church and State.

At no time in human history has a union or partnership between the State and the dominant religious group ever led to tolerance, liberty of conscience, freedom of religion or freedom of speech. The inevitable result of any such union has been persecution. Painful persecution. Bloodstained persecution. Nation-destroying persecution. For us now, in 2026, to try and create a bridge between Church and State will also create a pathway to persecution. And that would mean the failure, at its core, of the American experiment.

As Sir Winston Churchill said, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." For the sake of future generations of Americans, and those who yearn for liberty of conscience worldwide, I respectfully urge that there be no "bridge" created between Church and State, that the Federal government upholds the strict wall of separation between Church and State, and that the inalienable rights of all, given by our Creator, and enshrined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights, be passed on as a blessed heritage to succeeding generations of Americans.

To paraphrase Winthrop, "The eyes of all the world are upon you." May God grant you wisdom as you deliberate on these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Conrad Vine, DMin
President
As a Needle to the Pole, Inc.
PII
www.an2p.org
Email: PII
Email: PII
Cell: PII
Office: PII

From: KOEN ASHER <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – KOEN ASHER
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:37:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write from Pinehurst, Idaho, as a citizen who takes both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses seriously, not as competing interests to be balanced but as one principle to be honored. I ask you to consider what history teaches about the machinery of religious legislation, however well-intentioned its sponsors.

America has already run this experiment, more than once, with the same result. Salem's judges were devout and learned, yet a study of that tragedy concluded that "they verily thought they were doing God service, but they stand condemned for their folly, and for the wanton violence which they did to the plainest principles of morality." Two centuries later, in 1892, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers for plowing their own fields on a Sunday after having rested on Saturday, marching a sixty-two-year-old man through the streets in a chain gang while trainloads of other laborers passed the jail undisturbed every week. The editor who investigated, B. O. Flower, left us the standard by which any such law should be judged: no nation can afford to be unjust to her lowliest citizen. The lesson is not that Salem's or Tennessee's officials were wicked. It is that sincerity is no safeguard once the machinery of enforced religion exists.

That machinery, once built, does not stay small. The Two Republics traces how Constantine's first Sunday law, issued while he still held a pagan priestly office, grew through imperial patronage and clerical ambition into the Inquisition itself. The steps were logical, not accidental, which is the warning: "if the first step be taken, the last step is then as certainly taken; for the last step is in the first." No commissioner today proposes an Inquisition. No one ever does at the first step. The question is not whether a recommendation resembles history's endpoint, but whether it concedes the principle that government may define and promote religious duty. If it does, the rest is application.

Even a law that favors my own faith would cost me something essential. As one advocate put it 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." Any such law must define the religion it favors, and definition means exclusion. Worse, it binds even the included to practicing their faith by legislative permission rather than free conviction, and it forecloses their liberty to change their minds. A believer who locks today's creed into law has legislated against his own future conscience. I would ask this Commission to weigh that cost even for measures its members might personally welcome.

Finally, no amount of popular support can supply what is missing here. Rights that depend on majority approval are not rights but permissions, revocable whenever the majority shifts. A congressional committee understood this in 1829, ruling that the Constitution regards the conscience of a solitary dissenter as sacred as that of the whole community. As one witness told a Senate panel considering Sunday legislation, the people, however numerous, have no right to invade another person's relationship to God. That is the whole of my argument: majorities can build highways; they cannot build consciences.

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

Respectfully,
Koen Asher
Pinehurst, Idaho

From: Heather Perrin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church And State - Heather Perrin
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:41:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I am writing to share my great concern about the uniting of church and state. If we truly believe in religious liberty, we will keep these institutions completely separate. If they are combined, instead of bringing about greater liberty, our liberties will be eroded, and corruption of religion and government will follow. Our freedom of speech and freedom of conscience will be trampled. Funding Christian organizations with government money will bring about corruption of the worst kind.

I believe your intentions are good, but history clearly shows that this will only lead to religious persecution, which is your desire to prevent.

Please reconsider your plan of uniting church and state.

Thank you,

Heather Perrin
Pullman, Michigan

From: Katie Thomas <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Serious concerns about commission report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:47:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

My name is Katelyn Thomas. I live in Boyne Falls, Michigan, and I am writing because religious liberty matters to me, personally and as a matter of faith. I do not think this report protects it. I think it puts it at risk.

I am a Seventh day Adventist. We keep the Sabbath on Saturday, not Sunday. In the late 1800s, Adventists in several states were arrested and jailed for working on Sunday.

That history is part of why my church has never trusted the mixing of church and state. Once government starts enforcing one group's religious practice on everyone else, some faiths end up favored and others end up punished. My own church's history is proof of that.

Here are my concerns:

* 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.

I know the people on this Commission likely believe they are protecting religion. I would ask you to consider that separation of church and state is what has protected religion in this country, including mine, for well over a century. Please do not tear that down.

Sincerely,
Katelyn Thomas
Boyne Falls, Michigan

From: Gabriela DePhillips <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:56:40 -0400
Importance: Low
Inline-Images: image001.png

Dear Members of the Commission:

Thank you for the year of careful listening behind this report. As a Sabbath-keeping Christian, a missiologist, and a woman whose life's work is among believers from the world's least-reached communities, I read the draft with gratitude — and with one deep concern.

I gladly support most of what you propose: the Know Your Rights materials, the military and healthcare conscience protections (and the report's welcome mention of Sabbath observance), the stand against anti-Semitism, and the de-banking protections. These will help real people I know and serve.

My concern is simple: the strongest protections are the ones no future government can undo.

Recommendation 1 asks the Department of Justice to declare the meaning of the Religion Clauses by guidance. But guidance is a pendulum — what one administration issues, the next rescinds, as the school-prayer guidelines and the 2017 Attorney General guidance have both shown. A definition of religious liberty written by one White House will be rewritten by another, and minority believers — Sabbath-keepers among them — will be the first to feel the difference. Please anchor any guidance to what the Supreme Court has actually held, issued through formal rulemaking, so that it protects everyone no matter who governs.

Recommendation 9 would allow campaign money to flow through churches, which alone among charities file no public financial reports. I have served alongside believers overseas for whom any public financial identification would be dangerous; that privacy exemption is precious, and it will not survive becoming a campaign-finance loophole. Protect the pulpit's speech fully — the report's own Chapter 3 shows how — but please keep campaign money out of the churches, for the churches' own sake.

Finally, I ask that the final report state its protections universally — for every faith and for those of none, including the Native American sacred-site concerns raised in your hearings. A liberty that shelters only the familiar will not last; one that shelters the stranger will be defended by all.

I am the wife of a house-church minister and the granddaughter-in-spirit of generations who kept the seventh day at real cost in this country. We are praying for your deliberations — that what you have built will be made to endure.

Respectfully,

Gabriela Phillips
Chattanooga, Tennessee
North American Division, Adventist Mission Director

Gabriela DePhillips
Multilingual Ministries
[redacted]

North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists®

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From: Jet 1 <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 21:58:20 -0400
Importance: Normal

Good day to you

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my thoughts, feelngs and concerns about church combining with state in matters concerning the worship of the Creator and individual religious preference.

I am very grateful for the freedom that we have in this country to worship God or not to worship at all. I see no need for our government to have anything to do with a person's religion or what he chooses to put into his body.

God made us free moral agents and no individual or group of individuals has the right to govern a person's choice but their own.

My greatest concern is when government exercises power over religion, there can only be one religion that predominates and all who do not fall into that class of believers will be persecuted. History very clearly bears witness to this.

America, being regarded as a Christian nation, will surely protect Christianity and in the future will take the position that if you are not a Christian, that you are a dissenter and deserving of punishment in some form or other. The liberty of many to worship according to their conscience will hereby no longer exist. May we remember that America came into existence because the first settlers were fleeing persecution of the church-state power in Europe

The blessing of the God of heaven has rested heavily on the USA because of the respect it has given its citizens in matters of religion and the right to worship God or not to worship. Buddhists, Atheists, Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus and many other religions have been free according to their God-given right to choose their own religion while being citizens of this great country.

May God's name be glorified going forward in the decision of this religious liberty committee regarding its draft report on religious liberty, in granting its citizens continued "true religious liberty", that liberty that allows each individual their freedom to choose their religion without government intervention or interference.

May this country acknowledge each individual's right to put into their body, which is their temple, only that which they deem good and safe and to refuse, without persecution, that which they deem otherwise.

My prayers ascend for each person who makes the decision regarding this report's final status.

In support of true, God-given liberty of conscience for every citizen in America,

Sincerely,

•~Judith E. Thompson ~
(Seventh Day Adventist Christian)

Jesus'll be here real soon!!! You @ peace with Him???

From: "Elijah V. Grinevich" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment Regarding the Religious Liberty Commission's Recommendations
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:11:36 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: image001.jpg

To the Department of Justice and the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write respectfully as someone whose family has lived under a government system where the state attempted to control religion, suppress religious conscience, and decide which religious voices were acceptable and which were not.

I was born in the former Soviet Union, in Belarus, in the aftermaths of religious turmoil and persecution. My family immigrated to the United States in 2001 as religious refugees. For us, religious liberty is not an abstract political phrase. It is part of our family history. It is part of why we came to this country.

My great-grandfather lived through two concentration camps during World War II and later became a well-known religious leader in the country of Georgia. During the Soviet period, he created an underground network to hide children of pastors and other religious ministers. This was necessary as the USSR took terminated parental rights and indoctrinated the children. My great-grandfather falsified documents, housed them on his estate, and used what he had to help preserve the faith and children of believers who were being targeted.

My grandfather was also a religious activist. He preached, wrote poetry, and lived under the constant threat of the KGB. Few months before our family's departure to the United States, he was killed after being run over by a car, twice, within one hour. This was to make sure he was dead. We do not have formal confirmation that the KGB was responsible, of course, but in the context of his life, his work, and the timing, our family has never believed it was a coincidence.

It was only after his death that we discovered that the house where we lived contained a secret printing press. That hidden, detached basement held equipment used to print Bibles and religious materials. It had been kept secret even from my adult parents and their siblings. It took his death to uncover the extent of what he had been doing. I still remember him singing and telling stories of how he was chased by the KGB.

We also knew that our next-door neighbors had been recruited by the KGB to spy on our house. Underground church at our house met in secrecy. Traveling religious leaders and ministers came through quietly. Everyone understood that open faith could cost a person education, employment, freedom, or worse.

My father was arrested several times for attending religious gatherings. Many were unable to complete their education because they refused to participate in political organizations. That was the system we came from: not merely a system where the government was hostile to religion, but a system where the government claimed authority over conscience.

My own experience was the lighter end of the ordeal because the Soviet Union collapsed the year I was born. Even so, I was singled out in school as "the Christian." I remember hearing comments from my teacher such as, "Look at this Christian," directed at me in class. That was minor compared to what others endured, but even as a child I understood that religion marked a person.

One of the most important lessons our family learned is that persecution does not always look the same for every religious group. In the Soviet system, some churches and religious figures were treated well if they cooperated with the state. The KGB infiltrated churches. It sent its own pastors and ministers. State-sanctioned churches were not persecuted in the same way. The government did not need to abolish religion completely in order to control it. It only needed to decide which religious voices were useful, which were safe, and which were dangerous.

That is why the American separation of church and state matters so deeply to me. It is not hostility to religion. Properly understood, it is one of the reasons religion can flourish freely. It protects the church from the state, the state from ecclesiastical capture, and the individual conscience from both.

Here in the United States, my family found the religious freedom that we did not have under Soviet rule. I completed my education here. I became an attorney. I am practicing in California and in federal religious liberty matters. I

am also a Seventh-day Adventist minister, completing seminary studies and planning academic work that I hope will serve people of all faiths. I believe in religious liberty not only for my own faith community, but for all faith communities, and also for those who do not share my beliefs.

Because of that background, I urge the Commission and the Department of Justice to be very careful in any effort to redefine or revise the definition of church-state separation. The language used in this area matters. The lesson of history is that religious liberty is not protected by giving government greater power over religion, by allowing government to favor politically useful religious voices, or by weakening the constitutional boundaries that prevent religion and civil power from becoming entangled.

I therefore respectfully ask the Department of Justice and the Commission to preserve a strong understanding of the separation of church and state as part of America's religious liberty tradition. This principle should not be dismissed as anti-religious. For families like mine, it is one of the safeguards that prevents the state from deciding which religion is acceptable, which church is legitimate, and which believer is safe.

I am particularly concerned by any recommendation or public guidance that would minimize the constitutional importance of church-state separation. I am also concerned by any effort to remove restraints that help keep churches from becoming instruments of political power or political campaigns from becoming instruments of religious control. When religious institutions become too closely tied to state power, both are corrupted. The church loses its prophetic independence, and the state gains a religious justification for coercion.

The experience of the Soviet Union taught my family that government control of religion can take many forms. It can be open persecution, surveillance. It can be denial of education or employment. It can be infiltration. It can also be selective approval of compliant religious leaders while independent believers are punished. That is why religious liberty requires more than permission to worship. It requires constitutional limits on government power in matters of faith.

I respectfully urge the Department of Justice to consider the experiences of religious refugees and persecuted believers when evaluating these recommendations. The United States should remain a country where faith is free because conscience is free, and conscience is free because the government does not own it.

Thank you for receiving public comments and for considering this perspective. I submit this comment as someone whose family fled religious persecution, as an American attorney who values the constitutional protections of this country, and as a Seventh-day Adventist minister who believes that true faith does not need the power of the state to survive.

Respectfully submitted,

_____

Elijah V. Grinevich
Attorney | Grinevich Law Group, PC

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PII

PII

From: Grace Elias <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:15:05 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

I completely agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments attached to my email. Please implement them.

Sincerely,
Grace Elias, MD

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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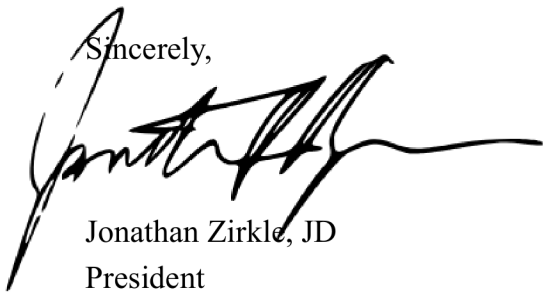
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020160

From: Charles Moran <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty - Charles Moran
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:21:05 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 12, 2026

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:

I am adding my voice to the many concerns you have received in regards to this matter. While it is true that America is a free nation complied off many different churches/religions, There has most always been freedom to exercise free choice as to what church or religion to attend, and further the God given right to worship(1) as one's conscience dictates. There are a few exceptions noted in our nation's history. (2)(3)

If in fact the separation of church and state were eliminated as proposed, which "church/religion" would the government bestow its favor on? Certainly the plethora of differences in beliefs and practices that does not bring unity in the churches would no further unite us under "One Nation Under God" if any one particular church or religion was chosen including my own. I am a Seventh Day Adventist, and I would not support a government supported brand of Christianity that favored Adventism, or any other church/religion. If such a "bridge" were built, who or what church would benefit? Which church(es) would be unintentionally be denied freedoms or not receive the same blessings?

I know that is not what is spoken of in this document, but if enacted, it does lay the groundwork for such a position to arise. History is replete with examples of not only Christians being persecuted for Faith, but even peoples of color, origins, and descendants of others.

Given these facts, I respectfully ask the commission to reconsider preserving the Johnson Amendment of 1954, and to not build a bridge to any one church or religion in the free United States of America.

Sincerely,

Charles Moran

(1) *"...that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.."*

United States Declaration of Independence July 4, 1776

(2) *Senator Henry Blair of New Hampshire introduced Sunday legislation in May 21, 1888*

(3) *Chain gangs and civil penalties imposed on "non conformist" American Sentinel Sept. 5, 1895*

From: Eric Palacios <[redacted]>
To: [redacted], Eric Palacios <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Maintaining Separation of Church and State.
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:21:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

I would like to inform The President's Religious Liberty Commission my stands regarding the recent works and recommendations recently presented to the President.

I oppose and am very concerned with the proposals given; which could lay the ground work leading to formally put into law Unification of Church and State.

The idea of putting into Law the principle of legislating in favor of the "common good" is a very dangerous one, specially when focusing on Religious Freedom.
When we think of the first Europeans who set foot on this new land, many where fleeing religious oppression, where the state would impose there religious interpretation onto the masses. Many of those who opposed were imprisoned and even put to death. Hence the term "Protestants".

That is why the founding fathers understood that we should not legislate in matters of the conscience. It would be left to the citizens of this nation the right to choose which God to serve if any at all.

I have personally benefited from laws that have made accommodations so that I can take National Board Exams on a day appointed that did not interfere with my religious beliefs. I do not take this for granted, as I have also been denied or "severely discouraged" to pursue a degree that requires exams and labs in the Sabbath day in another country where citizens that belong to another faith outside of the Roman Catholic have no rights but to obey the "common good".

As a Seventh Day Adventist my eyes and ears are on high alert, understanding that there can come a time when my religious perspective might not align with the majority.

Let us not forget, what makes this country great, is the liberty to exercise faith in accordance to my conscience, and that its laws will protect that right given to me by God.

What a beautiful and great country we have. God bless America.

Dr. Eric Palacios.

From: Joanne Aldrich <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:30:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

THANK YOU for your efforts in focusing on this most important issue. Liberty of conscience is perhaps the most sacred freedom we enjoy in this Country!

With all due respect, please consider carefully the dangers in trying to unite Church and State. Giving the government power over religious practices has inevitably resulted in persecution--the very religious tyranny millions have fled!

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I see Prophecy being fulfilled. The "deadly wound" of the Papal power spoken of in Revelation is virtually healed. The world is in fact "wondering after the Anti-Christ beast!" The pending Sunday laws being promoted will ultimately result in the death penalty for those who remain true to God's seventh-day Sabbath.

If we choose to remain loyal to man's laws, we will suffer the plagues of God and ultimately eternal death. If we choose to remain loyal to God's laws, we will suffer persecution but will be protected during the plagues and will gain eternal life!

I would encourage every member on the Commission to read the book, "The Great Controversy," by Ellen White. It describes in thrilling detail the events unfolding before our eyes! (Audio versions are available.) Start with the chapter, "Liberty of Conscience Threatened," to better understand the prophetic role you are playing.

The events in the story of Esther are being replayed. God's mighty hand will deliver His faithful people!

Prayers for each of you as you consider this most sacred issue!

Sincerely,

Joanne Aldrich

[redacted]

From: Ingrid Perrone <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty (Hereinafter "RLC") Draft Report, Issued June 2026
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:43:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

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:

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist who loves and keeps the Biblical Sabbath from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown as was celebrated at creation (Genesis 2:1-3), the fourth commandment which was written by the finger of God (Exodus 20:8-11), the same Sabbath that Jesus kept (Luke 4:16,31) and the same commandment his followers kept (Acts 13:13-16,42,44).

The preservation of the separation between church and state is necessary in order to prevent state or government's preference of one religion over another. History shows time and time again what this preference has brought about - persecution. This is exactly what our founding fathers were trying to avoid since they knew what happened in Europe and the pilgrims set sail to be free of religious persecution. "No King, No Pope" was the rallying cry for American Independence as it refers to the American Revolution's rejection of British rule and rejection of the Pope's influence. Our founding fathers would be rolling in their grave if they could see what is happening today.

In the words of Ulysses Grant, 18th president of the United States of America, "KEEP THE CHURCH AND THE STATE FOREVER SEPARATE"!

I humbly ask that you withdraw the bill as you would be causing more harm than good as this would be a precursor to catastrophic consequences.

Best regards and proud to be an American,

Ingrid Perrone

From: Carrie Bates <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concern regarding recent religious liberty commission hearings
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:50:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the board of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I have just recently been made aware that this board has been meeting, and is considering removing the wall of separation between the church and the state. As a Seventh Day Adventist Christian I cannot support this at all. The church controlling the government is what led to so many martyrs deaths and devastating persecution in Europe during the dark ages.

Our forefathers fled persecution because of church and state unification in their countries! They fought to liberate us from this. We must not let what has been won at such great cost, suffering and sacrifice to be lost! The government has no right to interfere in religion. And no church or religion has any right to use the government to enforce its own belief system on any person. That would be unconstitutional. Every man, by his God given rights should have full freedom to live according to the dictates of his own conscience. No king, president, dictator or otherwise has any right to make any laws respecting the establishment of any religion, or interfering with the free exercise thereof. The principle of the wall separating church and state is right there in the first amendment! Plain as day!

Back in the late 1800's when Sunday laws were beginning to be passed in the United States, a Seventh Day Adventist Christian named A.T. Jones went before congress and demonstrated that this was unconstitutional. They asked him if it would make him happy if it was the 7th day that was being enforced, since that was the day he worshipped on. He said absolutely not! No one should be forced to worship or not to worship on any day, or to be inhibited from working on any given day as one's own conscience dictates.

We must not repeat the mistakes of the past, which would eventually lead to untold suffering for those who are trying to live by their own conscience.

Please don't make choices that will result in the loss of religious freedom for Americans.

Sincerely,
Carrie B.
Silverton, OR

Sent from my iPad

From: Brandon Lester <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:51:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I strongly object to the proposals in your document and believe these actions would set the US back in time 250 years. The wall of separation between Church and State is a concept not a phrase included in the US Constitution clearly in the two clauses: Congress shall not establish nor inhibit the free exercise of any Religion including Christianity of which I belong as a Seventh Day Adventist.

The Proposals; from funding religious non-profit activities to repealing the Johnson Amendment, and funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses will erode the integrity of both institutions and lead to the degradation of the civil liberties of everyone.

I am refraining from citing the mountains of historical and Biblical evidence as to how we know this to be true because I am certain my audience is well informed and therefore chooses to believe that we are wiser than those before us. The founders new of the persecutions and trampling's of civil rights from the early colonies and that is exactly why they put the safeguards in our most foundational historical document that has endured the test of time.
Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it. Let's not repeat it!
Rather,
Let us hold firm to that which we know is True & Good and has served us well for so long.

This is my stance now, and will always be in the future.

Thank you.
Sincerely,

Brandon L.

From: Tyke Connell <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] A statement by the commission.
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 22:59:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

The statement by your commission that says " There is no separation of church and state" is very, very disturbing to me. To abolish separation of church and state goes against freedom of religion - To worship as one chooses. There will be religious persecution if this becomes law. Read what those who formed the ideas of this great country have said about this issue.
I am a Seventh-day Adventist, but it would affect Muslims and others too.
Please reconsider your decision.
Respectfully yours,
Darlene Connell
Keene, TX [redacted]

From: Carol Daitey <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – [Separation of Church and State] – [Carol Daitey]
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:10:28 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of The Religious Liberty Commission:

Please do not remove the Separation of Church and State from our way of life. History has shown that government control of the Church has been very detrimental to Christians costing millions of lives.

Once the government funds an organization, the government has control of it. I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and appreciate being able to worship on the Bible's Seventh Day Sabbath, the Day of my choice.

I appreciate living in "the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave" and will not continue to flourish if my religious liberty is taken away from me.

Please do not allow government funding to religious organizations.

Please continue to enforce the Johnson Amendment and do not repeal it. I appreciate the absence of politics in my Church.

Thank you,

Carol Daitey
I

From: Reiner Kremer <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Madaline Kremer
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:13:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen of Franktown, Colorado, to urge the Commission to protect religious freedom for everyone, and specifically to recommend against any policy that would create religious or worship mandates of any kind. I believe both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses rise or fall together, and I want to explain why, drawing on some of the strongest historical and logical arguments I know.

First, coercion cannot create genuine faith, and it corrupts the faith it claims to help. Religion is heart-work; a law can march a body into a pew but cannot put worship in the man, and forcing outward observance breeds hypocrisy rather than devotion. Worse, when the state props up a church, that church pays a hidden price. James Madison surveyed fifteen centuries of established Christianity and found the fruits were pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution. A faith that needs the police power to survive has already confessed something troubling about itself. Even Ulysses Grant, no clergyman but a president who had seen sectarian strife up close, counseled that religion belongs to the family altar, the church, and private conscience, and urged that the state and the church be kept forever separate.

Second, this is not a hypothetical worry; America has run this experiment and always reached the same result. The judges of Salem were devout and sincere, and they still trampled the plainest principles of morality while believing they served God. Two centuries later, in 1892, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers for quietly plowing their own fields on a Sunday after resting on their own Saturday Sabbath, marching men in their sixties through the streets in a chain gang while trainloads of other laborers passed the jail unmolested every week. Sincerity never protected the victims of Salem or Paris, Tennessee, and it will not protect the victims of the next well-meaning religious statute.

Third, history shows that the first religious law is never really the last, because the last step is contained in the first. Once Constantine issued the first Sunday law, the principle was conceded that government could enforce religious duty, and everything that followed, including the Inquisition, was simply that principle applied further. The government that takes sides in a religious controversy loses the very power to keep the peace it exists to secure. No one on this Commission proposes an Inquisition, but the danger was never that any single generation intended one; the danger is granting the premise that civil government may define and promote religious duty at all.

Finally, any law touching religion, even one meant to favor it, ends up narrowing free exercise for everyone, including its supposed beneficiaries. A law favoring my faith today becomes a precedent controlling my faith tomorrow, once the majority shifts. Anyone who welcomes government sponsorship of their own beliefs is trading away the freedom to change their mind later, should conscience lead them elsewhere.

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

Respectfully,
Madaline Kremer
Franktown, CO

From: Sam Cohen <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State- Sam Cohen
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:14:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

As a citizen I am writing 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.

As a 23-year veteran of the U.S. Army, Reserve, and National Guard and a retired municipal police officer, I am a devoted Patriot and deeply love my Country. My son and daughter followed me into the Army; we served to protect America's unique freedoms. I am also a devoted Seventh Day Adventist, thus a devoted believer in the whole Bible; the Old and New Testaments as the unerring Word of God. This absolutely includes Our Father's literal 10 Commandments, which are either disregarded by some churches as "hung on the cross" or modified to ignore the seventh day as God's Sabbath. My concern is that my religious convictions will be disregarded due to sentiments such as "the good of the community." In that case, if many people in my community do not believe the way I do, my freedoms would end.

Today our community of various churches in Yellville, Arkansas have no conflicts despite our various approaches to the true Sabbath. The recommendations in your report would stir political rivalry (Left vs Right) into conflicting Christian teachings, creating community disharmony.

Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them--and American citizens--free.

I am attaching a copy of the "Pillars of Freedom" comment on this subject, and I am in agreement with its sentiments.

Respectfully,

Sam Cohen
Yellville, AR

From: Michelle Calderon <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Richard and Michelle Calderon
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:19:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I appreciate the Commission's effort to address the important issue of religious liberty in America. In the Draft Report, I believe there is a historical perspective that deserves greater consideration—especially regarding the relationship between religious influence and governmental authority.

I understand the report's argument that religion has played an important role in American public life and that the First Amendment was not intended to remove religious people or religious ideas from society. However, I believe the report does not fully address the concerns that have historically led religious minorities to value a clear separation between church and state.

One example that I believe is especially important is the debate over the Blair Sunday-Rest Bill of 1888. During the Senate hearings on this proposed legislation, A.T. Jones, representing Seventh-day Adventist concerns, warned that religious liberty could be threatened when the government uses its civil authority to enforce religious practices supported by a religious majority.

The concern was not simply that the government might establish an official church. The concern was that civil laws could be used to promote religious beliefs or practices, even while being described as ordinary legislation. In the case of the Sunday-Rest Bill, the issue was whether the government should use its power to require observance of a day that had religious significance for many Christians.

From my perspective, this history shows why many Americans have understood separation of church and state as a protection for religion rather than an attack on religion. It protects all people—those in the majority as well as those in minority faith communities—from having religious convictions enforced through government power.

The Draft Report appears to focus primarily on preventing an official establishment of religion or direct government coercion of belief. I respectfully suggest that history also teaches us to consider a broader question: what happens when government begins enforcing religious practices or values because they are supported by the majority faith tradition?

As someone who values religious liberty, I believe the experience of Seventh-day Adventists and other religious minorities during the Sunday-law controversies of the late nineteenth century provides an important historical lesson. A government that remains neutral toward competing religious beliefs creates the greatest protection for everyone's freedom of conscience.

I respectfully ask the Commission to consider this perspective as it reviews the Draft Report and prepares its final recommendations.

Sincerely,

Richard and Michelle Calderon

From: Bernadette Lyons-Sales <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report Comments
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:23:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

Breaking down the separation of church and state would bring persecution.

As a 7th Day Adventist, I believe in religious freedom. I would like to see that your report draft to reflect the separation of church and state be maintained.

Sincerely, Bernadette

From: ArvaDell Seltzer <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:28:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone
Hello! I am a Seventh- day Adventist and I support religious Liberty for everyone! This is why I would like to see the RLC maintain the wall of separation of church and state in America. God bless!

AD Seltzer

From: Rhoda Kanna <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Rhoda Kanna]
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:33:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Rhoda Kanna]

I have read the public comment filed by Jonathan Zirkle, JD/Pillars of Faith, to the published report of the Commission of Religious Liberty and am in complete agreement with his response to the issues addressed therein. I include my own response as well to the Commission.

I was born in Canada but became a US citizen in 2012. As I consider the commission's proposal to do away with the wall that separates the church and the state, I am concerned. As a practicing Seventh-day Adventist Christian and a student of history, I know that the wall has provided me liberty to practice my faith as I choose and to enjoy my God-ordained freedom of conscience.

A wall is often erected for protection – to keep good things in and bad, out. So it is in this case - to protect the church from government intrusion (government funding for religious education and non-profit organizations) and to keep the church pure from ecclesiastical authority in using the government to enforce its dogma (Sabbath keepers jailed in TN in the1800s for working on Sunday). While it is true that the words/phrase "wall of separation between church and state" are not used in the Constitution, the principle is certainly present and was implemented dating back to Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island.

And why did people come to America in the first place? Because Christians like me were escaping religious persecution. Why? Because there was no wall of separation between church and state in the old world, and the church was using the state to enforce church law.

This fact was forcibly brought home to me as I had the opportunity to visit historical sites of several Protestant reformers. Men such as John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, John Knox, John Huss, John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and groups such as the Waldenses, sought to follow the Holy Scriptures as they read and understood them. These people and people groups were often persecuted for their beliefs because they did not align with the church. The lives of some reformers even ended in violent death. Here the church used the state to accomplish what she could not do by persuasion.

George Santayana once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". When the church and state lock arms (or a "bridge" is made between them), neither church nor state benefits. The wall is there to protect both institutions. The United States of America is the amazing country it is because it protects religious liberty and freedom of conscience. NEVER tear down the wall of separation between church and state!

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Rhoda Kanna

Greeneville, TN

From: loveandlivetheword <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - On the Recommendations of and Principles Espoused in the Draft Report on Religious Liberty, Dated 6/26/26 - Submitted by Craig Kavanaugh
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:37:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

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:

I write to the members of this Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty today, both as a Bible-believing Christian and as a concerned citizen of these United States, born free in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the heart and home from which sprang the foundational liberties upon which this once great nation first developed; in fact, for several years, I lived directly next to the Paul Revere House on the "Freedom Trail" in Boston's North End, and frequently walk that trail by the USS Constitution, "Old Ironsides." Growing up and coming of age at the height of the Cold War and its seemingly ever-looming spectre of civilizational and ideological conflict and potential for global catastrophic fallout, I have always cherished a patriotic love of my country and its founding principles of civic and economic freedom and religious liberty, which at least used to be taught in our public and private school systems, of which I attended and graduated with honors from the best-of-the-best, to include Harvard University; I shudder at the thought of the current dearth of basic civics courses in our schools, which when coupled together with the revisionist mindset of many US and world history courses as taught today, has led to numerous perverted and convoluted ideas regarding actual American history and the true source of our country's marvelous ascendancy to global power and influence.

As a young adult, I became increasingly concerned as I witnessed our nation's communal commitment to these foundational freedoms devolve under the heavy weight of society's near-ubiquitous post-modern "isms": relativism, secular humanism, neoliberalism, atheism, radical egalitarianism, socialism, feminism, and gender dysmorphism, to name just a few of those desolating forms of false utopian philosophy that might well fall under the heading of "Slouching Toward Gomorrah," as coined by former US Appellate Judge, Robert Bork. Yet raised as a Roman Catholic and having focused my educational pursuits primarily in the fields of science and finance, I was not sufficiently informed through in-depth study of the documented course of world history as to properly understand the true roots of the rise, decline, and fall of history's world empires to be prepared for what I would next come to face in my own country, beginning at the time of the start of the new millennium.

The modern Commonwealth of Massachusetts has suffered not only under the oppressive influence of the aforementioned "isms," but also the great affliction of essential one-party political rule stretching for decades, supported by the near-singular religious backing of the very same Roman Catholic Church in which I was raised, a defacto church-state union that has led to stagnation, cronyism, and outright legal and political corruption under the guiding hand of intolerant religious bigots. The very government and Church that I had held up on a pedestal in my mind for my entire life were weaponized to work hand-in-glove against me to destroy my family, my finances, my career, and my reputation through a moral turpitude of corrupt bribery, self-dealing, and

intolerance. Believing in "the system," I spent more than a dozen years and the exhaustion of my life savings and thousands of hours of my personal time on legal research, filings, and pleas (up to and including appeals to the Massachusetts Supreme Court) that brought no substantive relief whatsoever. All three branches of the state government in the Commonwealth actively participated in this corrupt scheme (to include multiple family court judges, my local state representative, my local state senator, and the acting Governor at that time, all of whom were directly involved in my court case in a legally and morally nefarious manner); such transpired to my continuing utter disbelief, convinced that our country represented "the land of the free, and the home of the brave." Without other avenues of redress, I even for a time contemplated running for Governor of Massachusetts with the determination to personally root out this colossal corruption and reset the system aright on its founding principles, all simply that I might compel the government to recognize my God-given parental rights to interact with and have a loving influence upon the rearing of my own children, with whom I have been "legally" denied access to for over 23 years to this very day. For the Commonwealth of Massachusetts unconstitutionally removed my parental rights to my own children in the absence of strict scrutiny due process, and continues to this day to claim that such unlawful imposition shall remain in place permanently for life, all imposed "legally" under the color of law and enforced at the barrel of gun wielded by the authorities of state and with the full knowledge and consent of the Church.

Faced with such circumstances, many a man may have taken matters into their own hands; but by God's grace alone, I instead appealed my case to a higher Court, even an heavenly, in utter despair turning for the first time in my life to the power of prayer. And our amazing loving God in mercy saw fit to condescend to interpose in my life and to accept the appeal of my case in His righteous Courts. In response to my earnest prevailing prayers, the LORD God Almighty led me to a study and contemplation of His Word, the Holy Scriptures, which had been hidden and withheld from me my entire life up to that point as part of my Catholic upbringing (to include four years of religion classes at my Catholic high school, St. John's Preparatory School in Danvers, MA, during which we never once opened a bible). And His Word indeed has since become to me a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psa 119:105) and my meditation all the day long (Psa 119:97). A study of God's Word and true unvarnished history led me to surrender my heart and my life and the lives and well-being of my children to the authority and superintendence of Jesus Christ as our God and Savior and King. Such study also led me to reject the faith of my fathers and instead to choose to be baptized by immersion and make a profession of faith to become a bible-believing Seventh Day Adventist Christian. And armed with God's Word as my guide, I have come to study afresh with spiritual discernment the true history of this world and of our nation, the fruit of which I wish to offer to this Commission for its prayerful re-consideration as pertains to this issue of religious liberty of conscience and the matter of its recommendations regarding the so-called separation of church and state in the United States of America.

The Word of God is plain and clear that the One true living God of heaven is not only a loving God, but that God is love (1 John 4:8,16), and that our God desires that none be lost, but that all men come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9) in a saving love relationship with their Creator God (John 1:1-3; 3:16-17; 1 John 2:2). Every human being (not so brain damaged as to have become incapable of intelligent thought) understands implicitly that love can never be forced; anyone may choose to set their affections on another whom they desire, but unless that person chooses to reciprocate, whatever relationship they may have, it is not a true love relationship. A true love relationship requires the voluntary choice and continual consent of both parties involved. As such, God has given each one of His intelligent creatures here on earth (human beings), both the capacity and the responsibility to choose for ourselves whether or not to reciprocate God's love for us (1 John 4:19). Recognizing our fallen sinful condition (Genesis 3) in which our hearts (and minds) are naturally deceived by selfish desires and disinclined to love God or others (Jer 17:9-10), the grace of God (Eph 2:8-9) has further pledged to give each one of us a measure of faith to desire to respond to His love (Rom 12:3), and a conscience to discern between right and wrong that we might choose aright (Heb 5:14).

In the original language of the Scriptures in the New Testament, the word for "conscience" in Greek is *"syneidēsis"* (Strong's Concordance G4893); its Old Testament counterpart in Hebrew is *madā* (Strong's H4093). Now in its most basic fundamental meaning in the English language, *"syneidēsis"* actually might better be translated in common vernacular as "co-perception;" this Greek word is found 32 times in 30 verses in the New Testament, with multiple examples speaking of the capacity of one possessing a "good conscience" (Acts

23:1; 1 Tim 1:5,19; Heb 13:18; 1 Pet 3:16,21) or a "pure conscience" or (1 Ti 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3) or a "conscience void of offense" toward God (Acts 24:16; 1 Pet 2:19), or contrariwise, one may also possess an "evil conscience" (Heb 10:22) or a "weak conscience that is defiled" (1 Cor 8:7,10,12; Tim 1:15) or a hypocritical "conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Tim 4:2). Perhaps most importantly, the apostle Paul tells us that our conscience ought never to be judged by another man (1 Cor 10:29), because God alone can search and read the heart and mind and all the imaginations of our thoughts and motives (1 Chron 28:9; John 5:22), and which we humans cannot do.

The LORD further bids us by the prophet Isaiah to come and reason together (Isa 1:18): as such, if our conscience is actually our co-perception, then having a good conscience must mean that we are actually co-perceiving together with God Himself through His Holy Spirit, while having an evil conscience actually must mean that we are co-perceiving together with the father of all lies, Satan (John 8:44). As such, to properly understand the true Scriptural basis for liberty of conscience and its inviolability, no man can ever interpose to compel or force the conscience of another man, for to attempt to do so is to attempt to put yourself in the place of God, which the Scriptures in Greek terms "antichristos" or "the spirit of antichrist" (1 John 2:22), which actually represents the continual work of the devil, Satan. God never forces worship or our conscience, because such is antithetical to His very nature of love; one cannot cite a single instance in Scripture in which Jesus compelled anyone to bow down or worship Him, or to believe or think in any specific manner, but rather Christ only used loving persuasion and gentle compassion to draw His followers with lovingkindness (Jer 31:3). Only Satan, and all those with an evil conscience who are co-perceiving together with him, will ever attempt to employ force or coercion to compel the conscience of others to think or believe or worship exactly they themselves do. Recognizing such, and the inglorious history of all attempts by the Church to employ the power of the State to coerce the conscience or compel particular forms of worship, our founding fathers wisely concluded to enumerate and immortalize the principle of liberty of conscience into our founding documents (the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights to the Constitution) with the purpose of forever protecting our freedom of worship to serve God according to the dictates of our own conscience, God alone being witness and judge thereof. For those interested in exploring a more detailed study on these biblical principles, c.f. the following:

Co-perception: the Heart of Liberty of Conscience: (May 26, 2023)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wBEgDJT7hQ

Recognizing and Exercising the Power to Choose Liberty: (Jan 13, 2020)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRRg9s2beKM

Your draft report on Religious Liberty submitted to President Trump on June 26, 2026, recommends that the US federal government no longer recognize or acknowledge the principle of separation of church and state on the dubious claim that no such exact phrase may be found in the US Constitution; but such a claim denies the plain reality that the principle is very much imbedded in that very document, most clearly in the Bill of Rights' First Amendment to the US Constitution. While I wholeheartedly agree the Commission's assessment that this phrase has been bastardized and misused in modern times by secular humanists to push religious belief and expression from the public sphere in a manner never contemplated by our founders, such a conclusion does not warrant your recommended solution that the US federal government completely abandon the principle of its original advocacy by our founders and their incorporation thereof into our founding documents.

From a historical perspective, your report moreover appears to purport that outside of Thomas Jefferson's 1802 reference to that exact phrase in his letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, that such an idea was essentially foreign to our founders thinking and intentions in drafting our founding constituting documents; such is not an accurate history. Many other historical examples might be cited, but I will suffice to cite Samuel Adams' November 20, 1772, declaration, "The Rights of the Colonists," (four years prior to the US Declaration of Independence) which aptly and eloquently articulates the prevailing thought among a large segment of our colonial pioneers and America's founders on this subject, among other threats to liberty at that time (and today for that matter):
https://www.ff.org/the-rights-of-the-colonists-by-samuel-adams-november-20-1772/

For additional historical context and thoughtful commentary worthy of your consideration, and with which I heartily agree and support, I would point this Commission to the Public Comment by the Pillar of Freedom organization and ministry on July 6, 2026, by its President, Jonathan Zirkle, JD (linked here): https://drive.google.com/file/d/13wd1AsF3m6STwD-v0ywpXFYnI-VRv8TF/view

Finally, perhaps the best historical account available on the motives and thinking of our Pilgrim Fathers who braved great adversity and loss of blood and treasure to traverse the oceans in coming to this continent from Europe fleeing civil and religious persecution, and the incredible challenges and difficulties attendant thereto in upbuilding our nation as a refuge of liberty (as well as its biblical prophetic context and implications), I quote the following except from Ellen Gould White's inspired master work on this subject matter of liberty of conscience and America in bible prophecy in the book of Revelation, "The Great Controversy" (1911 Edition), for your prayerful consideration: (bold and underline highlights added for relevant emphasis)

"At this point [in Revelation 13] another symbol is introduced. Says the prophet: “I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb.” Verse 11. **Both the appearance of this beast and the manner of its rise indicate that the nation which it represents is unlike those presented under the preceding symbols**. The great kingdoms that have ruled the world were presented to the prophet Daniel as beasts of prey, rising when “the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.” Daniel 7:2. In Revelation 17 an angel explained that waters represent “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” Revelation 17:15. Winds are a symbol of strife. The four winds of heaven striving upon the great sea represent the terrible scenes of conquest and revolution by which kingdoms have attained to power." {GC 439.3}

"But the beast with lamblike horns was seen “coming up out of the earth.” Instead of overthrowing other powers to establish itself, **the nation thus represented must arise in territory previously unoccupied and grow up gradually and peacefully**. It could not, then, arise among the crowded and struggling nationalities of the Old World—that turbulent sea of “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.” I**t must be sought in the Western Continent**." {GC 440.1}

"What nation of the New World was in 1798 rising into power, giving promise of strength and greatness, and attracting the attention of the world? **The application of the symbol admits of no question. One nation, and only one, meets the specifications of this prophecy; it points unmistakably to the United States of America**. Again and again the thought, almost the exact words, of the sacred writer has been unconsciously employed **by the orator and the historian in describing the rise and growth of this nation**. The beast was seen “coming up out of the earth;” and, according to the translators, the word here rendered “coming up” literally signifies “to grow or spring up as a plant.” And, as we have seen, the nation must arise in territory previously unoccupied. A prominent writer, describing the rise of the United States, speaks of *“the mystery of her coming forth from vacancy,“* and says: “Like a *silent seed* we grew into empire.”—G. A. Townsend, *The New World Compared With the Old,* page 462. A European journal in 1850 spoke of the United States as a wonderful empire, which was “emerging,” and “*amid the silence of the earth* daily adding to its power and pride.”—The *Dublin Nation*. Edward Everett, in an oration on the Pilgrim founders of this nation, said: “Did they look for a retired spot, inoffensive for its obscurity, and safe in its remoteness, where the little church of Leyden might enjoy the freedom of conscience? Behold the *mighty regions* over which, in *peaceful conquest, ...* they have borne the banners of the cross!”—Speech delivered at Plymouth, Massachusetts, Dec. 22, 1824, page 11." {GC 440.2}

"“And he had two horns like a lamb.” The lamblike horns indicate youth, innocence, and gentleness, **fitly representing the character of the United States** when presented to the prophet as “coming up” in 1798. **Among the Christian exiles who first fled to America and sought an asylum from royal oppression and priestly intolerance were many who determined to establish a government upon the broad foundation of civil and religious liberty**. Their views found place in the **Declaration of Independence**, which sets forth the great truth that “all men are created equal” and endowed with the inalienable right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” And the **Constitution** guarantees to the people the right of self-government, providing that representatives elected by the popular vote shall enact and administer the laws. **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 oppressed and downtrodden throughout Christendom have turned to this land with interest and hope. Millions have sought its shores, and the **United States** has risen to a place among the most powerful nations of the earth." {GC 441.1}

"But the beast with lamblike horns "spake as a dragon. 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; ... 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." Revelation 13:11-14." {GC 441.2}

"The lamblike horns and dragon voice of the symbol point to **a striking contradiction between the professions and the practice of the nation thus represented**. The "speaking" of the nation is the action of its **legislative and judicial authorities**. **By such action it will give the lie to those liberal and peaceful principles which it has put forth as the foundation of its policy**. The prediction that it will speak "as a dragon" and exercise "all the power of the first beast" plainly foretells a development of the **spirit of intolerance and persecution** that was manifested by the nations represented by the dragon and the leopardlike beast. And the statement that the beast with two horns "causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast" indicates that the **authority of this nation** is to be exercised in enforcing some observance which shall be an act of homage to the papacy." {GC 442.1}

"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**. But the inconsistency of such action is no greater than is represented in the symbol. It is the beast with lamblike horns—in profession pure, gentle, and harmless—that speaks as a dragon." {GC 442.2}

"'"Saying to them that dwell on the earth, that *they* should make an image to the beast." Here is clearly presented **a form of government in which the legislative power rests with the people**, **a most striking evidence that the United States is the nation denoted in the prophecy**." {GC 442.3}

"But what is the "image to the beast"? and how is it to be formed? The image is made by the two-horned beast, and is an image *to* the first beast. It is also called an image *of* the beast. Then to learn what the image is like and how it is to be formed we must study the characteristics of the beast itself—the papacy." {GC 443.1}

"When the **early church became corrupted** by departing from the simplicity of the gospel and accepting heathen rites and customs, she lost the Spirit and power of God; and **in order to control the consciences of the people**, **she sought the support of the secular power**. The result was the papacy, **a church that controlled the power of the state** and **employed it to further her own ends**, especially for the punishment of "heresy." In order for the **United States** to form an image of the beast, the **religious power must so control the civil government** that the **authority of the state will also be employed by the church** to accomplish her own ends." {GC 443.2}

"**Whenever the church has obtained secular power**, she has employed it to **punish dissent** from her doctrines. Protestant churches that have followed in the steps of Rome **by forming alliance with worldly powers** have **manifested a similar desire to restrict liberty of conscience**. An example of this is given in the long-continued persecution of dissenters by the Church of England. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thousands of nonconformist ministers were forced to flee from their churches, and many, both of pastors and people, were subjected to fine, imprisonment, torture, and martyrdom." {GC 443.3}

"It was **apostasy** that led the **early church to seek the aid of the civil government**, and this prepared the way for the development of the papacy—the beast. Said Paul: "There" shall "come a falling away, ... and that man of

sin be revealed." 2 Thessalonians 2:3. So **apostasy in the church** will prepare the way for the image to the beast." {GC 443.4}

"The **Bible** declares that before the coming of the Lord there will exist a **state of religious declension** similar to that in the first centuries. "In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be *lovers of their own selves,* covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, *despisers of those that are good,* traitors, heady, high-minded, *lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness,* but denying the power thereof." 2 Timothy 3:1-5. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." 1 Timothy 4:1. Satan will work "with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness." And all that "received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved," will be left to accept "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11. When this state of ungodliness shall be reached, the same results will follow as in the first centuries." {GC 444.1}

"The wide diversity of belief in the Protestant churches is regarded by many as decisive proof that no effort **to secure a forced uniformity** can ever be made. But there has been for years, in churches of the Protestant faith, **a strong and growing sentiment in favor of a union based upon common points of doctrine**. To secure such a union, the discussion of subjects upon which all were not agreed—however important they might be from a **Bible standpoint**—must necessarily be waived." {GC 444.2}

"Charles Beecher, in a sermon in the year 1846, declared that the ministry of "the evangelical Protestant denominations" is "not only formed all the way up under **a tremendous pressure of merely human fear**, but they live, and move, and breathe in a state of things **radically corrupt**, and appealing every hour to every baser element of their nature to **hush up the truth**, and bow the knee to the **power of apostasy**. Was not this the way things went with Rome? **Are we not living her life over again? And what do we see just ahead?** Another general council! A world's convention! Evangelical alliance, and universal creed!"—Sermon on "The Bible a Sufficient Creed," delivered at Fort Wayne, Indiana, Feb. 22, 1846. When this shall be gained, then, in the effort **to secure complete uniformity**, it will be only a step to the **resort to force**." {GC 444.3}

"**When the leading churches of the United States**, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, **shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions**, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, **and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result**." {GC 445.1}

Commission Vice Chair, Dr. Ben Carson, an avowed Seventh Day Adventist, is fully aware of this history and prophetic understanding and ought to have earnestly advocated it before the Commission and shared a copy of this book with every Commission member. If he has not done so, I hereby recommend that each of you read the entire book, with an especial focus on the history of Christian religious persecution detailed in the early chapters of the book that cover the time of the Dark Ages and that following of the Reformation, as well as the later chapters on America's religious history and prophetic future (The Pilgrim Fathers, Heralds of the Morning, An American Reformer, Light Through Darkness, A Great Religious Awakening, A Warning Rejected, Prophecies Fulfilled, Liberty of Conscience Threatened, The Impending Conflict, The Scriptures a Safeguard, and The Final Warning), available for download as a free PDF here:
https://media2.egwwritings.org/pdf/en_GC.pdf

Such concerns of faithful Bible believers are no longer theoretical or simply a matter of debate, but are fast becoming reality in the recommended actions of this Commission to President Trump, and more so in the President's increasing employment of Executive Actions to unilaterally employ executive power in disregard of the constitutional checks and balances wisely instituted by our founders precisely to avoid the tyranny of wielding unchecked kingly power or the civil imposition of priestly intolerance. As documentation of this unmistakable trend, I offer the following presentation:

Two Horns of Liberty Broken: (Jan 17, 2026)

https://www.youtube.com/live/eLnrbYXNSVk

Having faced tremendously hurtful civil persecution and religious intolerance myself, I sympathize with the Commission's concerns regarding the extremities of secularization in our American society in recent decades, as well as the relevant personal cases of religious discrimination documented in the hearings cited in your report, and also the Commission's desire to do something about this injustice by attempting to swing the pendulum back toward a position of civic religious neutrality. I do not question or judge your motives in such an endeavor; I am not your spiritual judge, nor can I read your hearts...such are the sole prerogatives of God Himself. But I can forewarn you that despite your best intentions, Scripture and prophecy point to the concerning conclusion that your well-intentioned efforts will take on a life of their own beyond your control and will assuredly end in the pendulum swinging to the opposite extreme of the civil authority in the United States becoming controlled and employed by weak and corrupt religious institutions to enforce their religious dogmas that Truth and persuasion fail to uphold. Thus for the sake of the freedom and liberty of our country, and in the full knowledge that the KING of all the earth will be the final Judge and arbiter of these affairs and will hold you accountable for your decisions and influence, I hereby plead with you to reconsider your Commission's recommendations, and instead choose to return to the platform of Truth upon which our country was actually founded: an unswerving commitment to upholding civil and religious liberty, as summarized in the principle of the separation of church and state, whatever the cost.

Submitted in loving concern and humble prayers, your servant in Christ Jesus (the one true LORD, KING, and Judge of heaven and earth), with tears and trepidation,
Craig Kavanaugh
Silver Spring, MD

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"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;" (Acts 3:19)

From: Allan Burns <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:38:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I write with deep solicitude concerning the assertion that the Constitution of the United States establishes no meaningful separation between the church and the civil power. This is not a question of mere words or political preference. A sacred principle is involved—the God-given right of every soul to worship according to the dictates of conscience, without coercion from either church or state.

The First Amendment declares that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These provisions stand together as faithful sentinels guarding the citadel of conscience. They were not framed to weaken religion, but to preserve it from corruption. They prevent the state from controlling the faith of the people, and they prevent religious bodies from employing civil authority to enforce their doctrines and observances.

Religion cannot be advanced by human legislation. It is not within the province of the state to determine what men shall believe, how they shall worship, or what religious institutions they shall observe. The civil power may restrain violence, fraud, disorder, and every act by which one person injures the life, liberty, or property of another. But it cannot enter the inner sanctuary of the soul. That realm belongs to God alone.

Thomas Jefferson expressed this principle when he wrote of "a wall of separation between Church & State." This wall was not erected in hostility to Christianity. It was designed to protect religion from governmental interference and to protect civil government from ecclesiastical domination.

James Madison declared that religion "must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man." He understood that the rights of conscience do not originate with legislatures, courts, or constitutions. They are bestowed by the Creator and exist before the formation of civil government. Government does not grant these rights; it is under solemn obligation to protect them.

History bears a fearful testimony concerning the results of alliances between the church and the state. Whenever religious bodies have sought the support of civil authority, both religion and government have been corrupted. Pride and indolence have entered the clergy; ignorance and servility have been encouraged among the people; and superstition, bigotry, and persecution have followed.

"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."

—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (1888), 442.2

The constitutional safeguards were not accidental. Article VI forbids religious tests for public office. The First Amendment prohibits Congress from establishing religion or interfering with its free exercise. Together, these provisions withhold from the federal government jurisdiction over religious faith and observance.

Christ Himself marked the distinction between civil and religious authority when He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." The things belonging to Caesar are not the things belonging to God. Civil rulers have authority within their proper sphere, but they have received no commission to direct worship, define religious obligation, enforce the commandments of God, or compel observance of a sacred day.

The gospel employs no carnal weapon. Christ never forced the conscience. He presented truth, invited men to follow Him, and permitted those who rejected His words to depart. The religion of Christ must be accepted freely. Worship offered through fear of fines, imprisonment, loss of employment, or civil disability is not true worship. Compulsion may produce outward conformity, but it cannot produce faith, love, or obedience of heart.

Alonzo T. Jones presented these principles before the United States Senate during the controversy over the Blair Sunday-Rest Bill. He maintained that the state possesses jurisdiction over civil conduct and the equal rights of citizens, but not over worship, doctrine, belief, or religious obligation. His reasoning was sound: when the state undertakes to enforce a religious observance, it abandons its position as protector of liberty and becomes an instrument of religious coercion.

Jones declared:

"In all the powers thus delegated to Congress, there is no hint of any power to legislate upon any religious question, or in regard to the observance of any religious institution or rite."

—A. T. Jones, The National Sunday Law, NSLS27 46.8

The question is not whether Christians should possess moral convictions or bring those convictions into public life. Every citizen must be free to speak, reason, persuade, vote, and bear witness to truth. The question is whether the state may enforce a duty owed to God. Here the answer must be an unqualified No.

Civil government may forbid injury to one's neighbor. It may punish theft, violence, fraud, and disturbance of peaceful assemblies. But it must not compel prayer, church attendance, Sabbath observance, Sunday observance, religious profession, or conformity to ecclesiastical doctrine. It may protect a congregation while it worships, but it cannot compel the surrounding population to participate in that worship.

The danger is not removed because a religious law is supported by a

majority. Majorities possess no rightful authority over conscience. A Protestant majority has no more right to compel a Catholic than a Catholic majority has to compel a Protestant. Neither has the right to compel the Jew, the Muslim, the Hindu, the unbeliever, or the observer of the seventh-day Sabbath.

We plead not merely for ourselves. We plead for the rights of all.

Jones rightly stated:

“We are not only pleading for our own right to keep the Sabbath according to the dictates of our own consciences, but we are also pleading for their right to keep Sunday according to the dictates of their own consciences.”

—A. T. Jones, The Two Republics, TTR 851.1

True religious liberty is not toleration granted by a dominant religious body. Toleration implies that one authority possesses the right to permit or forbid another man’s faith. Liberty of conscience is an inalienable right. It belongs equally to the popular and the unpopular, to the majority and the minority, to the believer and the unbeliever.

The history of Europe reveals the results of the opposite principle. The papal system maintained that the church might properly employ the state to sustain religious authority. Pope Pius X expressed this conception in Vehementer Nos when he rejected the separation of church and state as a “most pernicious error.” Wherever such a principle has been fully acted upon, the civil sword has been employed in matters of faith, and persecution has followed.

In saying this, I do not condemn individual Roman Catholics. Many are sincere, conscientious, and living according to the light they possess. The issue is not the personal character of individual believers, but the principle that any church—Roman Catholic or Protestant—may control the state and use its authority to enforce religious observance.

Protestantism betrays its own foundation when it adopts the methods of Rome.

“Whenever the church has obtained secular power, she has employed it to punish dissent from her doctrines. Protestant churches that have followed in the steps of Rome by forming alliance with worldly powers, have manifested a similar desire to restrict liberty of conscience.”

—Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy (1888), 443.3

This danger is not merely theoretical. During the nineteenth-century agitation for Sunday legislation, conscientious observers of the seventh-day Sabbath were prosecuted for performing ordinary labor on Sunday after resting upon the day commanded in the fourth commandment.

In Rhea County, Tennessee, Seventh-day Adventists were placed in chain gangs. They were not criminals. They were peaceful, industrious citizens whose offense consisted in laboring on Sunday while conscientiously observing Saturday as the Sabbath. A contemporary Adventist report records that these men were even required to serve additional days

because they would not labor upon the seventh-day Sabbath.

Such events demonstrate the true character of religious legislation. The law may be presented as a measure for public rest, national morality, or social order; but when it selects a religious institution and enforces its observance, it places the power of the state behind religion and invades the domain of conscience.

I am therefore deeply troubled by renewed appeals for blue laws, compulsory Sunday observance, or any form of Christian nationalism that would erase the distinction between civil government and religious authority. Men may speak of restoring God to the nation, but God is not honored by forced worship. He is dishonored when His name is employed to justify coercion.

The church has been entrusted with the Word of God, the proclamation of the gospel, and the persuasive power of the Holy Spirit. When she possesses the Spirit of Christ, she will not ask the state to compel men. When she loses the power to persuade, she is tempted to grasp the power to coerce.

The purity of religion is best preserved when faith depends upon truth, love, conviction, and the working of the Holy Spirit—not upon taxation, political privilege, civil penalties, or legislative decree. The freedom of government is likewise best preserved when no denomination is permitted to wield the sword of the state for the advancement of its doctrines.

The wall separating church and state is therefore not a modern invention or an expression of hostility toward religion. It is a concise description of a principle rooted in the Constitution, defended by Jefferson and Madison, and upheld by faithful advocates of religious liberty.

This separation does not require Christians to remain silent in public life. It does not forbid prayer, testimony, moral conviction, or the free proclamation of the gospel. It forbids the employment of governmental power to establish, advance, privilege, enforce, or suppress religious belief and observance.

I respectfully urge the Commission to reject every interpretation of the Constitution that weakens this safeguard. The distinction between civil authority and the conscience is a constitutional necessity, a biblical principle, and one of the noblest features of the American system of liberty.

Let the state protect every person in the peaceful exercise of faith. Let the church rely upon the power of truth and the Spirit of God. Let no human authority enter the sanctuary of conscience.

Here we must stand firm. For when the civil power undertakes to command the conscience, religious liberty is no longer secure, and the way is opened for intolerance and persecution.

From: "Diana B. Lucas" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -Chapter 1 (Establishment Clause)-William and Diana Lucas
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:44:31 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

We are writing to submit our public comment regarding the draft report, "12 Opportunities to Strengthen Religious Liberty for All Americans," which became available for review on June 26, 2026.

As faithful Seventh-day Adventist Christians we respectfully, yet firmly, express our deep concern and clear opposition to the recent conclusion of the religious liberty commission, which concluded that there is no true or absolute separation between church and state.

The following points are important to us concerning government involvement in religious matters:

- For centuries the alliance between church and state led to the suppression of conscience and widespread persecution in Europe. The Pilgrims, and many who came to America sought freedom from state-controlled religion.
- According to the Bible, Christ declared, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s” in Matthew 22:23. We believe in civil relations with the government, but also believe that God alone holds authority over our worship and conscience.
- Faith must be voluntary and no other man or state has jurisdiction over conscience.
- Religion is most secure when it is independent of governmental power.
- All American citizens should have the right of their own conscience which would remain free from political control.
- The purpose of separation between church and state is not to exclude religion from public life, but to prevent the use of governmental power to advance, enforce, privilege, or suppress religious belief.
- As articulated in the Declaration of Independence which state that all are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights to Life, **Liberty** and the pursuit of Happiness.

Thank you for considering our feedback on this critical constitutional matter.

Sincerely,

William and Diana Lucas

Martindale, Texas

From: Roderick Harris <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – [Continuation of Separation of Church and State Precedence] – [Roderick Harris]
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:45:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I would like to thank you for your patriotic work in seeking the protection of our American religious exercise, houses of worship, protection from discrimination, protection of individual conscience, actively combating antisemitism, and fighting for the protection of minority faiths. Each of these pillars makes this country a great nation that is second to none on the face of the earth!

The Establishment Clause exists to protect two complementary freedoms: 1. Free Exercise of Religion and , 2. No Establishment of Religion. Neither clause is complete without the other. Remember, checks and balances that have made this nation great. The elimination of one or the other would yield a result that even the Commission has never seen personally.

History repeatedly demonstrates a predictable cycle:

1. Government begins favoring one religion.
2. That religion receives privileges.
3. Political influence follows.
4. Minority faiths become second-class citizens.
5. Dissent becomes viewed as disloyalty.
6. Religious tests appear.
7. Civil liberty erodes.

This pattern appears repeatedly throughout history.

Examples include

- medieval Europe
- England before the Toleration Act
- colonial Massachusetts
- colonial Virginia
- numerous European state churches

The American founders intentionally sought to avoid this pattern.

America was already not-liked (an understatement) by Prince Metternich of Austria in the 1800's and he stated as such. Free-government such as the early colonies was a threat to monarchies everywhere else in the world at the time.

America has become one of the most religiously diverse nations in history precisely because government generally avoided establishing a national church.

Baptists ,Methodists, Adventists, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Latter-day Saints , Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics

all enjoy legal equality because government officially favors none.

That neutrality—not hostility—has been one of America's greatest constitutional achievements.

If you count only broadly recognized denominations or traditions, these groups together encompass well over 1,000 distinct religious or philosophical bodies, schools, movements, and traditions. If you also include independent churches, local associations, monastic orders, and regional fellowships, the number rises into the many thousands. This remarkably underscores why constitutional protections for both the free exercise of religion and governmental neutrality toward religion have been so important in accommodating people of widely different beliefs.

In recent decades, some public policies have at times reflected an overly restrictive interpretation of religion in public life, leading some Americans of faith to feel excluded from the public square. Those concerns deserve serious attention and constitutional protection. However, the appropriate response to one constitutional imbalance is not to create another. We should not swing from unnecessary governmental hostility toward religion to governmental favoritism toward religion. Constitutional liberty depends upon maintaining principled neutrality—not replacing one form of imbalance with another.

A Partial American History on the subject of Governmental and Religion mixing: Here's some names that are worth remembering: Jefferson, Madison, Roger Williams, Isaac Backus, John Leland, The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. All of these argued that government should neither persecute religion nor control religion. The ability of the President of the United States to establish a Commission for Religious Liberty is itself a "beneficiary" to hopefully "right the ship" and bring America back to it's roots of "One Nation under God". However, this was not intended, as evidenced by history, to conduct a repeat of the religious persecution that our Pilgrim Fathers faced in Europe over the centuries.

Here are some Supreme Court precedents worth noting:

Case	Importance
Everson v. Board of Education	Applied the Establishment Clause to the states and emphasized government neutrality toward religion.
West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette	Government cannot compel matters of conscience.
Sherbert v. Verner	Protected religious exercise against substantial burdens.
Wisconsin v. Yoder	Recognized strong Free Exercise protections.
Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah	Government cannot target particular religions.
Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer	Government generally cannot exclude religious organizations from otherwise available public benefits solely because they are religious.
Kennedy v. Bremerton School District	Recognized protections for personal religious expression by public employees under certain circumstances.

Together these cases show that the Court has long sought to protect both free exercise and limits on governmental establishment, even as its doctrinal approach has evolved over time.

Here are some historical precedents that support separation:

- Roger Williams founding Rhode Island on religious liberty
- William Penn's Pennsylvania

- Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786)
- James Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*
- Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation" letter
- First Amendment
- No Religious Test Clause (Article VI)
- Baptists' advocacy against established churches
- Seventh-day Adventist historic advocacy for liberty of conscience
-
- Regarding Antisemitism and subjective interpretation:
- discussions need to revolve around, 1. criticism of Israeli government policies versus hostility toward Jewish people; debates over anti-Zionism and whether, in particular contexts, it constitutes antisemitism; differing definitions promoted by organizations such as the Internation Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism. We need to combat genuine antisemitism but with caution that protects free speech and religious liberty, apply neutral standards, and avoid suppressing legitimate political or theological viewpoints because they can be controversial.

Historically,

Catholics have been persecuted by Protestants.

Protestants by Catholics.

Baptists by Congregationalists.

Jews by Christians.

Christians by secular governments.

Adventists by Sunday Blue-laws in the 1800s in Tennessee and Alabama.

Jehovah's Witnesses for refusing patriotic rituals.

Muslims after 9/11.

Atheists in some highly religious societies.

The lesson is consistent:

Every religious majority eventually becomes a religious minority somewhere.

Therefore,

the constitutional protections we defend today for those with whom we disagree are the same protections that may one day defend our own liberty.

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Biblically,

Joshua bade the Israelites in, Joshua 24:15: And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." They chose and God did not force.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted to curtail free speech against the God of the three Hebrew boys after the fiery furnace in Daniel 3:29: Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss

against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. ". However, note that there was no affirmation or blessing bestowed by God for him making such a decree. Since this is about Religious Liberty, this story serves as a precedence against control of the free-press. To compel one's conscious and/or free speech is not God, but, from the other one who sought to be like God.

Signs that violence has been done to the separation of church and state:

America aligning itself with Israel - This supports only a portion of Protestant America and not the whole of Protestant America. Just think: if the shoe were on the other foot and the controlling Protestants would want to control the minority, would it be fair and right in the eyes of God who is fair to the greatest and least of all people on the earth?

All the churches that are accepting 501(c)(3) status - this was/is an open door to excuse the lobbying and political manipulation through the pulpits of America. This was too easy to fall for and most of the churches did just that.

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- Finally, I stand with those who love the Lord and want to please Him by keeping His commandments. However, Jesus says, "If ye love me keep my commandments" Jn 14:15. Love is not forced, nor compelled. I couldn't imagined being forced to love God, nor my spouse. It would be drudgery and neither God nor my spouse could accept it. God is Love. 1 John 4:8. Charity (translation=love) is kind (I Corinthians 13:4). Can we force someone to serve God? Perhaps "loving" them with patience and kindness would work better than force and unkindness.

Respectfully Submitted,

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- Roderick Harris
- Lincoln, Maine
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From: Jenee' Rose <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Seperation of church & state
Date: Sun, 12 Jul 2026 23:59:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as an active duty military spouse of 19+ years of current service who deeply values religious freedom and the right of every person to follow their own conscience.

I appreciate the Commission's stated commitment to protecting people of faith from discrimination. That protection matters, and I believe it should apply equally to people of every religion, as well as those who do not practice a religion.

I myself am a 7th day Adventist and my active duty husband is an atheist. I believe the freedom of choice for each of us is vital in the matters of religion - even if we disagree with the beliefs of others, we must respect their choice in God and worship or lack thereof.

The first 4 commandments are between God & and individual's conscience. The last six are our duties between man - our moral civil duties. The first four pertaining to God should be left untouched legally (respecting religions thereof), to be up to the personal conviction of each individual and never enforced by law.

Every governing power from Babylon, medo-Persian, Greece, and Rome have ALL been large governing powers that have combined church & state and ultimately fallen. It does NOT save our country by uniting church & state, instead it seals our doom for collapse as a Nation as we will no longer be a FREE Nation respecting the freedom of choice in religion for each individual.

We go back to reflecting a mirror image of Roman papal power that we once fled from and protested against to seek religious freedom from at the beginning of this Nation. Please read Daniel 2 & Revelation 14:6-12.

Not only do we reflect a mirror image of the Papacy but we give homage to their claim of authority above the word of God, when we celebrate the venerable day of the pagan sun on Sunday, disregarding the Creator's 7th day Sabbath memorialized at creation in Genesis.

Revelation 14 calls for us to remember our creator. Exodus 20 outlines of all 10 commandments only ONE says to "remember" which is the ONE commandment we have "forgotten" through papal tradition giving homage to Sunday not remembering the biblical 7th day Sabbath. Yet even then, if it was the 7th day Sabbath being uplifted, and encouraged to have a rest or worship day upon, we should STILL not enforce it by law. For it disregards the freedom of choice in religion and matters of conscience for each individual.

When a Nation forces the conscience in matters of personal beliefs or deeply held matters of conscience by law it is only forcing external compliance not the genuine surrender of the heart.

Only the Holy Spirit can convict the heart as it is a personal choice out of love to God not out of force. God does not force us to love or choose Him. We should not do the work of God's enemy who IS behind attempts to force one to go against their conscience.

I was in support of the freedom of choice and conscience during the 2020 pandemic, whatever that choice may be for an individual, but that their choice should be respected and not pressured or coerced into compliance against their will. That is personal choice and so is matters of religion, worship, or lack thereof.

I am concerned by the recommendations that would weaken the separation of church and state. In particular, I oppose expanding government funding for religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

My concern is not based on hostility toward religion. It is because I believe faith is strongest when it remains independent of government money and political influence. Once religious organizations begin relying on public funding, the government must decide which activities, beliefs, and organizations qualify for support. That creates the possibility of favoritism, political pressure, and unequal treatment.

I am also concerned that repealing the Johnson Amendment would draw churches further into partisan politics. Places of worship should be communities where people can come together in faith, including people who may vote differently. Turning churches into political campaign platforms risks dividing congregations and shifting their focus away from their spiritual purpose.

Religious liberty does not require the government to promote religion. It requires the government to protect everyone’s freedom to believe, worship, speak, or decline to participate without coercion or favoritism.

Please revise the report to support a clear and consistent separation between church and state, maintain and enforce the Johnson Amendment, and ensure that government remains neutral toward all religions.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Jenee' Rose

Sent from Proton Mail for iOS.

From: Janice Fitch <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:00:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the President's Religous Liberty Commission Mr.Patrick Chairman, Dr. Carson Vice Chair and all other members

The Pilgrims fled England to escape religious persecution. There were many thousands of martyrs in England just because they owned a Bible and read it. All through history whenever religion joined with government, Religous groups men,women and children that didn't conform to the religion of the religo-politcal King or government were burned at the stake,drowned or tortured unjustly in the most vile ways. These Pilgrims came to the shores of America so they could worship God as their conscience dictated.

After they got here many of them also started persecuting those that didn't worship as they worshipped. You had to join a State church in order to hold a public office and taxes were collected to pay the minister's salary.

Roger Williams who was chased out of the Puritan colonies and hunted like an animal because of his beliefs of religious freedom for all founded Rode Island. His colony had true religious freedom. You could truly worship the way your conscience dictated. He and William Penn are who Franklin and Jefferson read and studied.

In 1644 Williams famously wrote" when they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of separation between the Garden of the Church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall it selfe,removed the candlestick, &c. and made his Garden a wilderness, as at this day" Discribing the spiritual danger of blending government power with faith. When the church invites government to help with monies or enforcement of doctrines, it tears down it's protective boundary. The end result the government corrupts the church. It goes from a garden to a wilderness. Jefferson and Franklin knew that to take one brick out of the wall, the whole wall would come down taking America back to the dark ages.

I am a concerned Christian. In 1888 many Seventh day Adventist Christian were put on chain gangs or imprisoned because of the relio-political laws that had been past. As a Seventh day Adventist I pray that doesn't happen again.

Sincerely Miachel Fitch

From: Brenda Morris <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:06:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a US citizen and want to express my concerns about the draft report. This country needs to keep the wall up between Church and State. People who were persecuted in Europe by a church state power came to the United States for freedom. Then the Puritans here in Massachusetts Colony started persecuting those who did not agree with them. Roger Williams was banished from Massachusetts Colony because he advocated for the separation of church and State. Ultimately our government followed Roger Williams stand on this for the religious freedom we have now. A church becomes corrupt when it gains power from the government. That's why Jesus was crucified. The Jewish church leaders sought the power of government to crucify Jesus. That's why the Johnson act should be upheld.

My great grandfather John Neff was Mennonite. His ancestors came to this country in the 1600s to escape the persecution they were experiencing in Europe by a church using government power.

My Seventh Day Adventist church's heritage is to stand for religious freedom for all religions, not just our own. A.T. Jones went to congress in 1888 to show why the Blair Bill for a Sunday Law should not be passed. He said our church would not want a seventh day sabbath national law either because it would restrict the rights of Sunday keepers.

The first amendment to the Bill of Rights states that congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise of it. Please keep up the separation between church and state.

Thank You!

Sincerely, Brenda Morris from Liberty KY

Sent from my iPhone

From: Kathryn Leon <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Kathryn Leon
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:17:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the members of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty,

Like you, I have been horrified and frightened to watch the country I love move further and further into secularism and immorality. So, I clearly understand your desire to encourage the citizens of this country to embrace Biblical morality. However, I do not believe that such a positive change can be brought about by using government authority to support church activities.

Like Dr. Ben Carson, I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who is very grateful that the LORD permitted me to be born in the United States. Having lived in several other countries, including eleven years in P.R. China, I am acutely aware that the freedoms we enjoy in this country are unlike any other country in the world - even unlike any country in this world's history. Our country's constitution was written by men who were, I believe, inspired by God. There is no other document like it. It was written by men who knew that the maintenance of the separation of church and state was critical for the protection of religious freedom and freedom of conscience. And, only because we have obeyed this separation so far, have we freedom of conscience here.

Read the history of the "Dark Ages," and you can clearly see that, when the church can use state power to enforce her doctrines, the result is always persecution and loss of freedom of conscience. The early settlers to this country were fleeing the tyranny and religious persecution that resulted from the church using state power.

Accordingly, I am writing to plead with you not to recommend any changes which would weaken the separation of church and state in this country. Please do not repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment, or recommend that our government fund religious organizations' engagement in religious activities.

I am earnestly praying that God will lead you to make wise decisions,

Kathryn Leon

From: Ally <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission - Dawn Youmans
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:27:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

I fully agree with Pillar of Freedom's stance on the Religious Liberty Commission. I believe the Johnson Amendment is important and should continue to be enforced. We should not do anything that could weaken the separation of church and state. Keeping these separate is essential to preserving the freedoms we enjoy as citizens of this great nation. The principles embodied in the Constitution protect individual liberty of conscience and I do not believe the Religious Liberty Commission upholds that principle.

Looking back on my life, I am thankful for the religious liberty I have enjoyed and for the freedom others have as well. As a child, I became a Non-Denominational Christian. As a young adult, I learned more biblical truths, and through studying the Bible I became convicted of what God's Word teaches. As a result, I joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Without religious liberty, I would not have been able to make that decision freely—or at least not openly.

When I visited China, I was not allowed to bring a Bible into the country. There is no true separation of church and state there, and that is deeply concerning. The loss of religious freedom does not usually happen overnight; it often begins with small steps like this.

While I pray that I would faithfully stand for Christ according to my moral convictions, I do not believe politics and religion should be intertwined. I believe God's government is founded on freedom of choice, and He desires our service out of love alone. Faith should never be compelled by the government, but should come from a willing heart. As Jesus said, "...Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21, KJV).

Sincerely,
Dawn

Sent with Proton Mail secure email.

From: Cascaval Ion <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:29:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Department of Justice and Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my official public comment regarding the draft report recently issued by the Religious Liberty Commission.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I am deeply concerned by portions of the draft report that challenge the traditional separation of church and state. True religious liberty can only exist when the government remains neutral and does not favor, sponsor, or intertwine itself with any specific faith or religious ideology.

Confounding church and state functions poses a direct threat to the freedom of conscience for religious minorities. I urge the commission to strongly reaffirm a strict separation between government policy and religious practice to ensure that liberty of conscience remains protected for all Americans, regardless of their faith.

Thank you for your time, consideration.

Sincerely,

Ion Cascaval

From: Lemuel Sapian <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE, AND PEACEFUL PLURALISM – LEMUEL V. SAPIAN
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:34:09 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: RLC_Letter_-_July_12_2026_-_Lemuel_V._Sapian.pdf

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July 12, 2026

SUBJECT: PUBLIC COMMENT – RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE, AND PEACEFUL PLURALISM – LEMUEL V. SAPIAN

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

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

I respectfully submit this comment regarding the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission's draft report. I commend the Commission for recognizing that religious liberty is not adequately protected when religious citizens are told that they must conceal their faith as the price of participating in public life. The First Amendment does not require a secularized public square, nor does it treat religious conviction as a disability from which citizens must distance themselves before speaking, serving, teaching, voting, or holding public office.

I write as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, a ministerial student, and a commissioned officer serving as a chaplain candidate in the United States Air Force Reserve. I do so entirely in my personal capacity. The views expressed here are my own and do not represent the Department of Defense, the Department of the Air Force, the Air Force Reserve, or any other agency of the United States Government.

My concern is not that the Commission has defended religion too strongly. My concern is that, in correcting genuine abuses committed in the name of "separation of church and state," the report may weaken the constitutional distinction that has protected religious liberty from both governmental hostility and governmental control.

A proper distinction between religion and government does not mean freedom from the presence of religion. It means freedom of conscience: the right to believe, worship, speak, witness, assemble, abstain, convert, or decline religious belief without governmental compulsion. It protects religion from the state and the individual conscience from both religious and secular establishments.

The answer to the attempted exclusion of religion is therefore not the governmental elevation of Christianity, or of any other religious

tradition. The answer is the equal liberty of all.

The constitutional framework

The Constitution begins with an aspiration rather than a declaration of national perfection. “We the People” established the Constitution in order to form “a more perfect Union.” The wording acknowledges that the American project is unfinished. Our constitutional order is a continuing effort to bring people of different regions, backgrounds, convictions, and religious traditions into one political community without requiring them to surrender their deepest beliefs.

Article VI prohibits religious tests for federal office. The First Amendment then commands that Congress shall make no law “respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” These are not opposing instructions. They are mutually reinforcing limits upon governmental power. Government must neither establish religious orthodoxy nor suppress religious exercise. It may not compel a creed, and it may not impose irreligion as a creed of its own.

This constitutional arrangement should not be understood as indifference toward religion. It reflects humility about the jurisdiction and competence of civil government. Government possesses legitimate authority to preserve order, protect rights, punish crime, and secure the conditions of civil peace. It does not possess the competence to determine which theology is true, which denomination most faithfully represents Christianity, which mode of worship God accepts, or which citizen has correctly ordered his or her conscience before the Creator.

Religious truth is not rendered unimportant because government lacks jurisdiction over it. On the contrary, matters of faith are placed beyond ordinary political control precisely because they are too important to be settled by elections, executive orders, administrative agencies, or temporary majorities.

Democracy answers the question of who may govern. Constitutional liberty answers the equally important question of what even a majority may not rightfully govern. Conscience belongs within that protected sphere.

The lesson of the Pilgrims

The American religious-liberty tradition arose partly from the experience of men and women who knew what it meant to live under an established religious order. The Pilgrims fled England after suffering under laws that did not merely encourage religion but enforced conformity to a government-favored church. Their flight first to the Netherlands and then across the Atlantic stands as an enduring testimony to the human longing to worship according to conscience. Many other colonists similarly came to America seeking escape from laws compelling participation in officially favored churches.

Yet the history of colonial America also provides a warning. Communities that fled persecution did not always extend equal liberty to those who dissented from them. Some who sought freedom for their own faith later reproduced forms of religious establishment and

exclusion in the societies they controlled.

That contradiction does not diminish the importance of their search for freedom. It reveals that religious liberty remains incomplete when it is claimed only for ourselves.

The American achievement was not accomplished in a single voyage, colony, statute, or generation. It emerged gradually as the principle of refuge for one persecuted community matured into a principle of freedom for every conscience. Our history is therefore not simply a story of religious people seeking liberty. It is the continuing struggle to transform the liberty sought by particular groups into a liberty secured equally for all.

That is part of what it means to form a more perfect Union.

Christian influence without Christian establishment

Christianity has unquestionably influenced American history, moral language, public institutions, and conceptions of human dignity. Acknowledging this influence should not be controversial. Nor should religious citizens be prohibited from bringing Christian moral reasoning—or Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or other moral reasoning—into public debate.

But influence is not establishment.

Christians may persuade their fellow citizens. They may advocate legislation on the basis of moral convictions formed by faith. They may serve in government, speak openly about God, establish religious institutions, provide charitable services, and contribute to the common good. What they may not rightfully demand is that the machinery of the state confer upon Christianity an authority that must be accepted by citizens who do not share it.

The difference is the difference between witness and compulsion.

Christianity itself supplies a governing principle for this distinction in the Golden Rule: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” A Christian who would object to being governed by the doctrines of another denomination, another religion, or an officially atheistic state should not employ political power to impose his own religious orthodoxy upon his neighbor.

The liberty I claim for myself before God must be the liberty I am prepared to defend for another.

That does not require me to believe that all religious claims are equally true. Religious pluralism is not theological relativism. It does not demand that Christians cease proclaiming Christ, that Jews cease practicing Judaism, that Muslims cease following Islam, or that nonbelievers adopt religious language they do not accept. It requires only that civil government not decide ultimate religious truth for the people.

In a free society, competing truth claims may be preached, debated, criticized, accepted, or rejected. What converts may not be produced

by civil penalties. Political power can compel outward conformity, but it cannot create faith.

Chaplaincy as constitutional pluralism in practice

My experience as an Air Force Reserve chaplain candidate has strengthened rather than weakened my commitment to this principle.

Military chaplaincy provides a practical example of how a government institution can respect religion without establishing a government religion. Chaplains do not enter military service after abandoning their ecclesiastical identities. Each remains accountable to a particular faith tradition and ministers according to the convictions and requirements of that tradition.

At the same time, the Chaplain Corps exists to help protect the free exercise rights of all service members. A chaplain may personally perform ministry consistent with his or her own faith while helping provide access to appropriate religious support for those belonging to other traditions. Air Force policy describes the Chaplain Corps as providing worship, pastoral care, religious accommodation, spiritual care, and leadership advisement while helping ensure opportunities for the free exercise of religion.

This is not religious relativism. Nor is it institutional atheism. It is principled pluralism.

I do not compromise my Christian faith by defending the ability of a Jewish Airman to observe the Sabbath, a Muslim Airman to pray, a Catholic Airman to receive the sacraments, another Christian to worship according to his or her own denomination, or a nonreligious Airman to decline religious observance. I honor my vocation by recognizing that coercion would violate both their conscience and the character of genuine faith.

The military does not maintain chaplaincy in order to establish a national theology. It does so because military service may place members in circumstances where ordinary access to religious communities is limited. The government therefore facilitates free exercise without dictating the content of belief.

This offers a model for the broader republic: conviction without coercion, religious presence without religious establishment, and cooperation without governmental control of doctrine.

Neither religious establishment nor institutional secularism

The Commission is correct to warn that secularism can cease to function as a limited principle of governmental nonestablishment and become a comprehensive ideology hostile to religious expression. A government that permits secular philosophical convictions in public life while treating religious convictions as constitutionally suspect is not neutral.

But the response to an attempted establishment of secular ideology cannot be an establishment of Christianity.

Replacing one favored orthodoxy with another does not vindicate freedom of conscience. It merely changes which citizens possess governmental advantage and which citizens must appeal for tolerance.

A constitutionally neutral government is not an atheistic government. It is a nonconfessional government composed of citizens who remain fully free to be religious, irreligious, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, agnostic, atheist, or something else. Its neutrality concerns governmental authority, not the private convictions of the people serving within it.

Religious people must therefore remain free to bring their beliefs into the public square. They must receive equal access to public programs, institutions, employment, education, and speech. At the same time, the government must not identify citizenship with adherence to a preferred religion or transform a demographic majority into an ecclesiastical ruling class.

Majority rule is necessary for ordinary democratic decision-making. It is not a license for the majority to govern the conscience of the minority.

A Christian majority may be tempted to assume that state support of Christianity would be benevolent because Christianity is true or morally beneficial. History counsels caution. Once government acquires power to define and support "Christianity," government must determine which Christianity qualifies. It must choose among denominations, doctrines, moral teachings, institutions, and religious authorities. What begins as governmental protection of religion can become governmental supervision of religion.

The church may believe it has gained a powerful ally, only to discover that the state has become its regulator.

E pluribus unum

The enduring American ideal is expressed in the words E pluribus unum—out of many, one. The phrase does not mean that the many must become identical before they may belong to the one. It means that people who remain genuinely different may nevertheless share citizenship, constitutional loyalty, and responsibility for the common good.

Religious pluralism is therefore not a weakness to be reluctantly tolerated. Properly ordered, it is a bulwark against tyranny.

A nation containing many independent religious communities is less vulnerable to domination by a single ecclesiastical authority. A public square open to religious and nonreligious citizens alike is less vulnerable to domination by institutional secularism. A constitutional order that protects minority conscience restrains the majority today while protecting that same majority should it become a minority tomorrow.

The Golden Rule, constitutional restraint, and historical experience all point toward the same principle: we secure our own liberty most faithfully when we secure equal liberty for our neighbor.

I respectfully urge the Commission to make this principle unmistakable in its final report. The Commission should continue opposing efforts to exile religious expression from public life. It should affirm the right of religious citizens and institutions to participate openly and equally in American society. But it should also reaffirm that civil government must not establish, prescribe, or privilege a religious orthodoxy.

A bridge should indeed exist between religious citizens and participation in public life. But the constitutional boundary between ecclesiastical authority and governmental power must remain secure.

The answer to hostility toward religion is not religious establishment. The answer is freedom of conscience.

The answer to coercive secularism is not coercive Christianity. The answer is peaceful religious plurality.

The answer to the temptation of majority domination is the promise of equal liberty under law—a liberty strong enough for the Christian, the Jew, the Muslim, the Hindu, the atheist, and every other citizen to live together as many, yet remain one.

That is not freedom from religion. It is religious liberty in its fullest and most American sense.

Respectfully submitted,

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Second Lieutenant, U.S. Air Force Reserve
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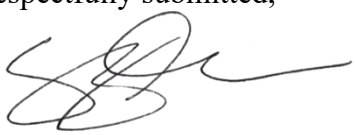
Respectfully submitted,



LEMUEL V. SAPIAN
Second Lieutenant, U.S. Air Force Reserve
Chaplain Candidate

Submitted solely in a personal capacity. The views expressed herein do not represent the Department of Defense, the Department of the Air Force, the Air Force Reserve, or any other agency of the United States Government.

From: Myles Reiner <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Myles Reiner:
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:43:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Myles Reiner:

Sunday, July 12, 2026

Member of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist christian who is strongly convicted that our founding fathers acted in harmony with Godly and biblical principles when they included the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. In so doing, our founding fathers were protecting all religious groups from one another and disallowing future government leaders from taking it upon themselves to establish a national religious preference in this country, that could possibly prohibit Anyone from exercising their God given right to freely worship their God per the dictates of their conscience, as guided by their Creator. The Constitution was written to limit the power of government and to protect its citizens from a far-reaching and intrusive entity. Our founding fathers rejected the idea of a king and an all powerful religious leader. Tampering with the first amendment would jeopardize the fundamental rights that it insures to every citizen of this great nation.

The Johnson Amendment should remain intact and Not be removed. It has provided a valuable hedge of protection to tax exempt organizations that serve their communities. This Amendment is a safeguard that keeps tax exempt organizations free from the control of special interest groups and/or political pac's who would buy their influence and thus reduce or even negate their effectiveness as a tax exempt organization servicing the needs of the community.

The Constitution, given to us by our Founding Fathers, is our greatest safeguard from oppression, intolerance and religious persecution. "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;" They believed and stated that these unalienable rights were endowed by their/our Creator, "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."

Let us be careful Not to Undo that which God has given.

Sincerely,

Myles Reiner
Phoenix Arizona

From: margaret song <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Margaret Song
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 00:56:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Commission:

I am a Bible-believing Christian and member of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. In the tradition of my spiritual forebears, I strongly oppose any action to weaken the "wall" of separation between church and state. Christianity has flourished in the United States for 250 years precisely because of this separation. From the very earliest days of European colonization of this land, religious minority sects, including the Baptists and Anabaptists, found refuge here from persecution in nations where the distinction between church and state was blurred or did not exist. The history of persecution and the firm beliefs of numerous Christian denominations and groups informed the founders of this nation, including James Madison, who penned the glorious First Amendment, which articulates our most treasured and sacred rights, and arguably defines the cornerstone of what indeed has made this nation "great" and drawn millions of hard-working people to its shores.

Secularism has too often taken the form of a militant anti-Christian force in academia and the media, attacking the expressions of those whose beliefs are informed by a Biblicial worldview. When instances of persecution arise on account of expressions of faith or actions taken that are informed by faith, the government must seek to protect such expressions and actions. However, history informs us that allowing the government's hand in promoting faith does not result in the greater flourishing of faith. Violating the Establishment Clause often results in violation of the Free Exercise Clause. We can look to the earliest examples of such attempts in America as in Massachusetts Bay Colony, where dissenters were punished and clerics who preached "heretical" doctrine were banished. Hence Roger Williams fled and eventually founded Rhode Island Colony, where religious freedom was guaranteed to Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and atheist alike.

A recent example of how violating the Establishment Clause resulted in violation of the Free Exercise Clause can be found in your Committee's own history. Carrie Prejean, informed by her Catholic faith, expressed concerns with how Zionism is impacting United States policy toward Israel and our military actions, including the Iran War which has cost American lives. Members of your Committee found her expressions offensive, and the result was that she was CANCELED. This illustrates the fact that uniting "church" and "state" results in the "state" being forced to decide religious doctrine, and marginalizing or canceling those who do not conform.

Making taxpayers fund religious organizations as well as repealing the Johnson Amendment are equally bad ideas that will result in weakening the true witness of Christian churches, whose Leader's entire life illustrated the fact that His Kingdom is not of this world.

From: Pablo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] The Lessons of History: A Solemn Appeal on the Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:12:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Distinguished Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I write to you today in the spirit of absolute respect for the heavy responsibilities you bear, yet with a profound and urgent burden concerning the destiny of our nation. We are living in an hour where the foundations of our Republic are being systematically re-examined, and the historic boundaries that have guaranteed our peace are being challenged. As public discourse increasingly turns toward the idea that the civil power must be utilized to restore the moral fabric of our society, we are brought face-to-face with the ultimate question of human existence: Shall the conscience of man be free, or shall it be coerced by the state?

If we truly desire to make America great again, we must understand what made her great in the first place. It was not the enforcement of a state religion, nor was it the legal compulsion of religious devotion. The true greatness of America lies in her unprecedented commitment to the absolute liberty of the individual conscience—the recognition that a man's duty to his Creator is entirely independent of human legislation, and that every individual has the sacred right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of his own heart, or not to worship at all.

To fully comprehend the danger of the hour, we must look to the powerful warnings delivered by the great Seventh-day Adventist pioneer, A.T. Jones, during his historic testimony before the United States Senate Committee in 1888. Standing against the Blair Sunday Rest Bill, Jones articulated a timeless principle that this Commission must desperately remember today: The moment the church calls upon the state to enforce its decrees, it confesses its own spiritual bankruptcy. When a religious body possesses the power of the Holy Spirit, it needs no civil laws to compel compliance. It relies on the power of love, the power of truth, and the drawing grace of God. But when the church loses that spiritual power, it invariably reaches for the sword of the magistrate. It seeks to substitute the power of God with the power of the police. This union of the church with the civil power has been the historic engine of every religious persecution since the dawn of time.

We see this truth illustrated perfectly in the sharp warnings of Holy Scripture. When we turn to the Gospel of Luke, we find a profound narrative that exposes the natural, yet deeply flawed, human impulse to use force in defense of faith. As Christ and His disciples journeyed toward Jerusalem, they sought lodging in a village of the Samaritans. Because of ancient religious prejudices and theological divisions, the Samaritans flatly rejected them and refused to allow the Savior to enter their town. Seeing this open insult to their Master, the disciples James and John were filled with a fiery, zealous indignation. They turned to Jesus and asked: *"Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?"* (Luke 9:54).

They believed their zeal was righteous. They believed they were defending the honor of God by wishing to destroy those who rejected Him. But what did the Master do? The scripture records that He turned, and He rebuked them. He looked into their hearts and exposed the hidden danger of their religious zeal, saying:

"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." (Luke 9:55-56).
If the state today, under the pressure of a well-meaning but deeply mistaken religious populace, chooses to translate and reinterpret the foundational understandings of the First and Fourteenth Amendments, it will commit the exact same error as James and John. By rewriting the constitutional definition of religious liberty to mean the freedom of the majority to enforce its religious preferences upon the minority, our leaders will be acting in direct defiance of Jesus' own words, His own attitude, and His explicit rebuke. They will be moving in a spirit that is not the spirit of Christ, but the spirit of antichrist. History demonstrates with absolute clarity that whenever the state attempts to establish righteousness by law,

it inevitably repeats the fatal flaws of the past, and the immediate, unavoidable result is the return of religious persecution.

Let us never forget the ultimate lesson of the New Testament: It was a union of church and state that crucified the Lord of Glory. It was the religious council—the Sanhedrin—desiring to protect their theological system, combined with the civil authority of the Roman Empire, represented by Pontius Pilate, that nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. The church provided the religious accusation, and the state provided the physical force. This is the ultimate warning against the commingling of these two distinct powers. The gospel never coerces; it never demands; it never uses force. Christ stood before Pilate and openly 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). The authority of Christ is a moral authority, won by the sacrifice of the cross, and it utterly rejects the assistance of civil government to enforce its claims.

If we turn our eyes to the history of our own land, we must remember the solemn account of Roger Williams, the courageous founder of Rhode Island. Williams was a deeply pious minister, yet he was ruthlessly banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony into the freezing depths of a New England winter. Why? Because he dared to stand against the prevailing theology of his day and declare that the civil magistrate has absolutely no right to interfere in the relationship between a man and his God. Williams rightly argued that the state is instituted solely for civil matters—to preserve public order, protect property, and defend physical life—but that it has no jurisdiction over the "First Table" of the Law, which governs our worship of the Almighty. Williams taught that forced worship is an abomination, a literal "soul rape" that creates hypocrites instead of true converts. He established Rhode Island on the revolutionary principle of absolute "soul liberty," proving that true freedom is found only when the church and the state are kept entirely separate.

The unmistakable sign of every false religion on the face of the earth is force. Truth stands on its own merits; it requires no bayonets, no legislative acts, and no penal codes to sustain it. Error, however, cannot survive without the arm of civil power to enforce its dogmas. If America, at the federal level, decides to embark down this perilous road of enacting religious laws and using the machinery of government to compel religious conformity, we will lose our moral standing before the world. We will become no better than the totalitarian regimes we are currently opposing and bombing—such as the fundamentalist government in Iran, which uses the brutal power of the state to force its state religion upon its citizens, crushing all dissent and destroying the conscience of its people.

To abandon our heritage of religious neutrality is to guarantee the end of the American experiment. The great experiment of American democracy was built upon the idea that a nation could exist in peace where men of all faiths, or no faith at all, could live together as equal citizens under the law, protected by the grand wall of the First Amendment. If we tear down that wall in a fit of zealous nationalism, we will unleash the dark forces of religious strife, bigotry, and oppression that tore Europe apart for centuries and drove our forefathers to these shores.

I appeal to this Religious Liberty Commission to stand as a faithful guardian of our constitutional heritage. Remember the lessons of history. Remember the warnings of A.T. Jones. Remember the banishment of Roger Williams. Most of all, remember the rebuke of Jesus Christ to His own disciples when they sought to use fire to defend His name. I urge you to resist every pressure to use the civil power for religious ends. Let us protect the purity of the faith by keeping it free from the pollution of political power, and let us preserve the freedom of our nation by ensuring that the conscience of every American remains accountable to Almighty God alone.

With the highest sense of duty and prayers for your guidance,

Pablo Garcia
Advocate for the Preservation of Civil and Religious Liberties

From: Maurice Mason16 <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 01:38:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty

U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 5706
Washington, DC 20530

The Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report reviews the historical foundation of religious liberty in America and articulates perceived threats to religious liberty along with recommendations to improve First Amendment protections. In many places throughout the report, the Commission advances the view that religion strengthens families, promotes charitable works, increases civic virtue, and positively impacts education, healthcare, and community life. The report also states that religion should not be banned from the public square and that separation of church and state has been misinterpreted and wrongly applied throughout American law and public policy. Therefore, the Commission recommends increased legal protections for religious expression in schools, healthcare, military, workplace, faith-based initiatives, and all areas of public life.

Seventh- day Adventists agree with many of the concerns and goals outlined in this report. Adventists have always defended the constitutional right of every person to worship God according to the dictates of conscience without government interference. Throughout its history, the church has advocated religious liberty for every person regardless of faith or religious conviction. Liberty of conscience is a biblical principle, yet Adventists recognize that history has also shown the danger of allowing civil government to interfere in matters of religion. Government should protect the free exercise of religion, but it should never promote religion, enforce religious doctrine or regulate religious practice. Freedom from government interference does not promote religion; it merely allows every person the freedom to worship (or not) according to conscience. There is a distinct difference between the protection of religious liberty and the encouragement of religious

practice. Maintaining this distinction is vital both to the preservation of religious liberty and constitutional government.

What is the biblical basis for this principle? Matthew 22: 15–22 records the occasion when Jesus was questioned about paying taxes to Caesar. He asked for a coin and inquired whose likeness appeared upon it. When they replied " Caesar's," Jesus answered, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21, KJV). With these words Jesus established one of the foundational doctrines of religious liberty. God instituted civil government with the authority to regulate civil affairs (such as taxes) while Christ alone is Lord over the affairs of the heart. When government attempts to regulate or control religious belief and practice it trespasses on divine authority.

History is filled with the heartbreaking results of failing to understand this truth. During the 1500s and 1600s, much of Europe was embroiled in religious conflict. Catholic and Protestant governments established state churches and frequently punished members of society who refused to conform to the religion established by civil authorities. Thousands were imprisoned, exiled, tortured or killed for worshiping differently than the state sanctioned church. People finally recognized that civil government was not the means by which one produces true Christianity. Government oppression corrupted both church and state while violating the liberty of conscience every human being possesses.

Roger Williams was one of the leading advocates for religious liberty during the early years of America. Roger Williams was deeply troubled by religious intolerance in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Williams concluded that civil government had no authority in matters of conscience. The state should never use force to control religious thought or practice, but should always protect everyone's right to worship freely. Williams described this concept as establishing a "hedge" or "wall" of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world. If the church becomes entangled with civil government it will corrupt the former and threaten the freedoms of the latter. Roger Williams' beliefs about religious liberty greatly influenced the future development of America.

Another pioneer of liberty was William Penn. As the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania, Penn understood religious

liberty from both perspectives. He experienced religious persecution in England and founded Pennsylvania as a place where many different religious groups could live together without government intrusion. Liberty of conscience is a right from God and governments should never use their authority to regulate religious belief or practice. Pennsylvania thrived under this principle and proved that diverse religious convictions can peacefully coexist.

Contributing to this legacy were the Anabaptists. Originally arising during the Protestant Reformation, the Anabaptists believed each person should personally profess faith before being baptized. Even more important to religious liberty, the Anabaptists rejected state-controlled religion. True religion can only exist when entered into by choice. Anabaptists were persecuted by both Protestant and Catholic governments. Countless Anabaptists were imprisoned, tortured, drowned, or killed by the sword because they would not acknowledge the state's authority over spiritual matters. Their sacrifice stands as one of the most powerful testimonies to liberty of conscience.

America's Founding Fathers applied lessons learned from history when drafting the Constitution. The founders had witnessed religious persecution for centuries in Europe and were aware of religious dissenters who came to America seeking freedom. When drafting the First Amendment, they ensured that Congress would not establish a national religion nor interfere with individuals' freedom to worship as they choose. The United States was not seeking to exclude religion from society but ensure that government would neither control religion nor use force to mandate religious observance. For over two centuries this has provided liberty of conscience to the citizens of the United States.

Six years after the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist church, members faced a critical test of church and state relations. Senator Henry W. Blair introduced a bill that would have mandated Sunday as a nationwide day of rest. While many supporters thought this would benefit society, Adventists knew the issue was far greater than a uniform day of rest. The question before Congress was whether or not the government had authority to legislate religious observance. If government can mandate one religious practice, it will eventually seek to mandate others.

No one defended this principle stronger than A. T. Jones. Appearing before the United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor in December of 1888, Jones defended religious liberty and repudiated the Blair Sunday Bill. Congress has authority over civil matters but no authority whatsoever over matters of worship or the human conscience. Sunday law or no Sunday law, Sunday remains a religious institution. Civil government has no jurisdiction over religion no matter how well intentioned the goal. Once government takes authority over one aspect of religion, the wall of separation begins to crumble. Jones' defense of religious liberty before Congress is one of the most definitive statements on the subject in American history.

Ellen G. White tirelessly defended similar principles throughout her writings. "There have been alliances formed between the churches and civil governments," White wrote. "The result of this union is persecution" (The Great Controversy, p. 459). Time and again history has proven that if churches seek political power to enforce religious belief then persecution is sure to follow. Worship must always be voluntary. Faith cannot be legislated or coerced from an unwilling heart. Christians should respect and pray for government but they should understand that our ultimate allegiance is to God. When civil governments enact laws or standards that require people to worship contrary to God's commandments, then Christians should heed the apostle's words and declare before men that "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29, KJV).

Finally, the Blair Sunday Bill is significant to Adventists today because it represents a principle and not merely an incident in church history. Adventists were not – and are not – opposed to Sunday worship. Thousands of devout Christians worship on Sunday and do so according to the dictates of their conscience. Adventists oppose allowing government to influence religious observance. We believe that everyone should be free to worship according to conscience without the threat of coercion or punishment from church or state. Religious liberty not only protects the rights of Seventh-day Adventists; it protects the rights of every faith or no faith at all.

The Religious Liberty Commission is right to affirm that religious freedom is one of America's foundational liberties. Furthermore, people should not face discrimination in the public square simply because of their faith or religious beliefs. Seventh-day Adventists have championed these rights from the very beginning of our existence as a church. However, we must continue to uphold the distinction between church and state as

established by Jesus Christ, championed by Roger Williams, defended by William Penn and the Anabaptists, paid for by the blood of countless believers, eloquently articulated by A. T. Jones before Congress, and echoed throughout the writings of Ellen G. White. Government best exercises its God-given responsibility when it protects everyone's freedom of conscience without seeking to regulate, endorse, or mandate religious practice or belief.

Christians eagerly await the day when Jesus Christ will return and make the world right. Until then, we should defend the right of everyone to worship as they please. Freedom of religion will never produce true Christianity; only the Holy Spirit can do that. The church honors Christ when it proclaims the gospel through acts of love, persuasion, and biblical truth. Government best serves citizens when it protects justice, preserves civil order, and upholds the constitutional freedoms allowing everyone to worship God without fear of reprisal. By doing so, we heed the teaching of Jesus to "render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22: 21, KJV) and remember that God alone is Lord of the conscience.

From: Dennis Kendall <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Importance ot the Separation of Church and State - Barbara Kendall
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:07:09 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

I agree with the attached Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them. Christ Himself understood and taught the separation of church and state when He was asked whether it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not. In Luke 20:22-25 it is written, "Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar's. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's." When asked which is the greatest commandment He answered in Matthew 22:37-40, "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

The first four of the ten commandments inform us of our duty to God, and the last six summarize our duty to man. The first four commandments are moral obligations that relate to when and how or if we worship God, and no civil or ecclesiastical power has been given the authority to dictate what a person must believe or do in relation to them. These are inalienable rights that reside in the conscience. We have God alone to answer to in relation to this first table of the law. On the other hand, the last six commandments, the second table of the law, address how we relate to others. These laws God has ordained that the civil powers should have jurisdiction over, and it is the responsibility of the state to enforce them and to appropriately punish those who break them. The Word of God should be our source of guidance in all things, and the separation of church and state is His will, not a man-made construct. The prosperity of our nation is the result of its implementation, and the removal of it will just as certainly result in its downfall.

Sincerely,

Barbara Kendall
Addy, WA

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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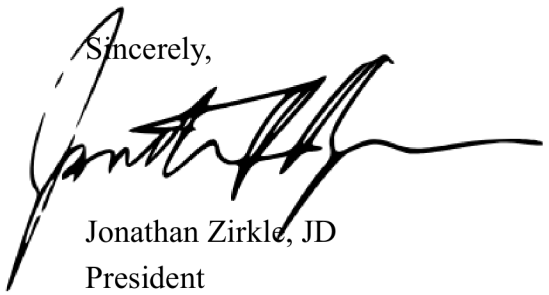
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020233

From: Lee Willson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 02:51:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

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, Issued June 2026

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

I am proud to be an American and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. As a student of history, I see that if we fail to remember the history of the past, we are doomed to repeat it. In every civilization, those that didn't fit the beliefs, practices, and in any way seemed diverse from the majority were rejected, downtrodden, and persecuted. Many, coming from places outside the shores of America, fled their homelands to pursue lives without oppression for their God given right…life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Unfortunately, the freedom of conscience they longed for themselves, they were unable to extend to others who were dislike them. That was still a big step. Roger Williams battled that in Massachusetts and then fled to Rhode Island where he set up a colony in which people with different beliefs and practices could live without abuse and mistreatment. The founding fathers of the US Constitution struggled with the same issues. Not all of the colonies had conformed to the Rhode Island blueprint, but when it was time to set forth the constitution, their desire for freedom and peace superseded the desire to control conscience and maintain conformity. In the body of the Constitution of the United States, the delegates made sure that religion was not a prerequisite for holding public office nor a test. The fear of establishing a nationwide endorsement of any religion, the tyranny of which their ancestors had fled, motivated them to establish a government based on civil principles that could govern diverse peoples without any religious entanglements. To reinforce their determination, they immediately endorsed the 1st Amendment to the Constitution which specifically stated - Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…

This government is a civil government. It is designed to govern people no matter their religious preferences. Worship is a matter of individual conscience and responsibility. Each person is free to make their own choice without the constraint of any other person. As a person of faith, my love for and commitment to God are taken seriously. It is my God given blessing and prerogative and should not be defined by a human institution. I do not sympathize with the philosophy of the Religious Liberty Commission Report. I do not believe that government should legislate morality. This country is displaying denigration not because of its laws, per say, but because each individual has not embraced God and forsaken sin. God allows religious freedom, liberty of conscience and has given each of us free will. Unfortunately, the majority of humanity does not embrace and appreciate His graciousness, lovingkindness, mercy, goodness, truth and yes, justice (there will be a reckoning and vindication).

I endorse these concepts:

1. Religion should not be invited into the governance of this or any nation. This so-called bridge will allow fullfledge tyranny to creep in and enslave people of different persuasions.
2. The Johnson Amendment must remain intact. If civil government should not interfer and trample in the affairs of religious faith, neither should the church step across the line and endorse political affairs. Each person should be free to make their selections according to their own conscience.
3. People of faith should be responsible for financing their own 'missionary' endeavors and not accept government support or subsidies. Receiving from government comes with the strangling attachment of conformity and compromise. Parents and religious educational institutions should not accept government means.
4. Our nation has been a bulwark since its inception. The Constitution has provided stability for over two hundred years. The same issues that caused the debate in the 18th century are facing us now, BUT those men yielded to the inspiration of the God of heaven to frame a document that would separate two powers….the power of the state and the power of the church. In union they can only promote a reign of terror. Separated, they each flourish in their own domains. When the church tries to buddy up with the civil power to promote, entice and coerce spirituality, it only demonstrates that the church is without the Godly power it claims and has failed.

Thank you for allowing me to express my thoughts in opposition to this document.

Megan Willson

From: Joshua Fortune <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 03:08:22 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

As a Christian and as an American citizen I would like to express that I do not agree with the Religious Liberty Commission's declaration that there is no separation of church and state. God does not force us to have faith in Him and operates on the principles of Love, Trust, and Freedom. God does not want people to serve him out of coercion but out of love. Furthermore, different denominations interpret the Bible differently and hold different values depending on their interpretation. Because of this each individual needs to have the freedom to interpret the Bible for themselves.

Thomas Jefferson explains it this way:

"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."

I believe that the government has no authority to tell you what to believe, or how to worship, and that the government lacks authority over religion.

I am also a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our co-founder Ellen White said:

"We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. Fervent, effectual prayer should be ascending to heaven that this calamity may be deferred until we can accomplish the work which has so long been neglected. Let there be most earnest prayer and then let us work in harmony with our prayers." — Testimonies for the Church 5:714 (1889).

"We cannot labor to please men who will use their influence to repress religious liberty...The people of God are not to vote to place such men in office, for when they do this they are partakers with them of the sins which they commit while in office." — Fundamentals of Christian Education, 475.

Sincerely,

Joshua Fortune

From: REBECCA OSTER <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 04:12:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

As a Seventh Day Adventist, I plead with you that you do not push to merge church and state. When we study history, we can see that when the state had say over religious matters, the people were persecuted. When I say religious matters, I'm specifically referring to the first 4 Commandments of the Bible. I believe that when Jesus spoke in Matthew 22:37-40 about our love for God and love for man (people), that He was referring to the original 10 Commandments. When you study, you can see that the first 4 deal with our love for God and the last 6 deal with our love for man (people). Why is this important? Well, the state can and should legislate how we treat each other, which is outlined in the last 6 Commandments, but legislating our love for God and how we worship Him as Creator, takes away the choice that God gives us to freely choose Him. God never wanted forced love or else He could've made Satan worship Him after his rebellion, but that's not the God we serve, the God of the Bible. He gives free will so that all can choose this day whom they will serve. As an SDA, you probably know that I worship on and keep the original 7th day Sabbath. And you should also know that I would never want the 7th day Sabbath to be legislated. Just like when Nebuchadnezzar realized that the 3 Hebrew men, who didn't bow to the image, worshipped the true God, and then later forced all the people in the realm to honor the true God or else they would be killed. This was not the right action to take. We need not force a relationship that cannot be forced. Like in a marriage, what kind of love would it be if you forced your spouse to be with you? That's not God of the Bible.
It's important that we remember history and why our forefathers left and came to our country...to get away from religious persecution. They saw the importance of keeping religion and politics separate, specifically for the first 4 commandments. May we not let history repeat itself, but instead, learn from it.
My family and I are thankful for religious freedom in this country and hope and pray that we can enjoy those freedoms here for the rest of our lives as well as for our children and so on.
I hope this meets you well and a reconsideration on this matter is made.
Blessings,
Rebecca Oster

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From: Elizabeth Vega <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:30:44 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the 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 I am mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which i agree with, i write to voice my agreement with the concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers of the dangers of a union of church and state and the many lessons of history regarding same. https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/president-trumps-religious-liberty-commission-delivers-historic-report-draft

As a citizen and a person of faith, I am deeply concerned and 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.

Please consider the comments in regard to this matter, in which I am in agreement, of the Seventh-day Adventist church's attorney Jay Cameron in behalf the Seventh day Adventist church and its members and organizations such as Pillars of Freedom and The American Historical Association. I stand in agreement with them especially in regard to your recommendation 1 and 9.

Please seriously consider revising your draft proposal in which you suggest our government should further disregard the traditional and longstanding principles of our first amendment: Keeping the government out of running churches and keep the churches out of running government.

It is precisely because a bridge has been built that further changes is felt to be necessary: Because the state has acknowledged atheistic, evolutionary secular humanism (which is a religion in itself, 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. This takes us directly back into the reformation era known as thr dark ages, where the founders of this country sought to escape, 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.

Our brethren the pilgrims, left Europe to come to America, escaping the unified efforts of Papal church and state persecution, due to enforcement of a religion against the conscience of Christians that did not agree with the church's teachings enforced by state's laws and military power. Have we forgotten the persecution by the church and state against the brutally martyred reformers? If it was not for Martin Luther and John Calvin and other reformers, we would not today, have the Bible in our language, to read it for ourselves, and worship God according to our own understanding and dictates of our own conscience. With this desire of liberty of religion and speech came the pilgrims, helping to establish this wonderful country we call America. With such liberties, Americans and society flourished.
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.”James Madison, Letter to Robert Walsh, March 2, 1819.

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.

The founders of America, deliberately created a national government devoid of specific religious authority to preserve religious freedom in civil society. While personal faith shaped individual founders, they chose to prohibit religious tests for office in Article VI and refused to assign any religious duties to the state. The Constitution established a secular framework that allowed religion to flourish independent of federal control.

I also 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.

Lastly, I object to the recommendation of the Committee that the Johnson Amendment be removed. As a follower of Jesus Christ, I am 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.

I 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.

Yours Truly,
Elizabeth Iannacone

From: Iurii Biziaev <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Establishment clause
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 05:30:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian to express my concern regarding portions of the Draft Religious Liberty Commission Report that appear to weaken the historic principle of the separation of church and state.

For Seventh-day Adventists, this is not merely a political issue—it is a matter of biblical conviction, religious liberty, and faithfulness to God. Our church has consistently defended freedom of conscience for every human being, regardless of religion or belief. We believe that civil government exists to protect the rights of its citizens, not to exercise authority over matters of worship or conscience.

America became a refuge for many who fled religious persecution in Europe, where governments frequently united with established churches to compel religious conformity. The founders recognized that whenever civil power is joined with religious authority, liberty of conscience is placed in danger. This conviction is reflected in the First Amendment, which prohibits the establishment of religion while protecting the free exercise of religion. These constitutional safeguards have made the United States a beacon of religious liberty for generations.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe that preserving the constitutional separation between church and state remains one of the greatest protections of religious freedom ever established. Therefore, I respectfully but unequivocally oppose any recommendation that would blur, weaken, or dismantle this foundational principle.

My convictions are also shaped by Bible prophecy and by The Great Controversy by Ellen G. White, a foundational work in the Seventh-day Adventist faith. That book teaches that, before the return of Jesus Christ, the United States will depart from its historic commitment to religious liberty through a union of church and state. It warns that civil authorities will eventually enforce religious observance—including Sunday observance through civil law—and that this will result in the oppression of those who choose to obey the biblical seventh-day Sabbath according to their conscience.

I fully recognize that members of the Commission may not share these religious convictions. Nevertheless, they are sincere beliefs that have shaped the Seventh-day Adventist commitment to defending religious liberty for more than 160 years.

For this reason, I feel a solemn moral responsibility to respectfully warn the Commission not to participate, knowingly or unknowingly, in any process that contributes to the erosion of religious liberty in the United States. I urge you not to support recommendations that weaken the constitutional separation of church and state or increase government involvement in matters of religious observance. History demonstrates that once government

acquires the authority to favor or enforce religious practices, freedom of conscience is inevitably endangered, and religious minorities are the first to suffer.

My appeal is not directed against any church, denomination, or day of worship. Rather, it is made in defense of the God-given freedom of conscience that has been protected by the Constitution of the United States for more than two centuries. Religious liberty belongs equally to Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, and people of every faith or no faith at all.

I respectfully ask the Commission to preserve the constitutional principles that have made America a refuge for religious freedom and to reject any recommendation that could contribute to the weakening of those protections. My sincere prayer is that this nation will remain faithful to the principles of liberty upon which it was founded and that the Commission will not become part of any process that leads toward the loss of those precious freedoms.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Iurii Biziaev

Seventh-Day Adventist Christian

From: Curt DeWitt <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Stop today's bill from passing
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:31:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Religious Liberty Commission;

I appeal for you to not press these measures to bring church and state closer together. This will violate the constitution and begin to take us down a road which will lead to infringement of the people's rights to worship according to individual conscience. Bring church and state together in past history has always lead to persecution!

Sincerely,

Pastor Curt DeWitt of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Jasper Tennessee

From: sda <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>, sda <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Recommendations of religious liberty commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:39:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Via EMAIL: [redacted]

RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION

I am thankful 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 I am mindful of the Committee's labors, which resulted in the 12 recommendations released June 26, certain of which I agree with, I am write to voice my fervent concerns and objections to the Committee's first and ninth recommendations [1] and its obviously insufficient consideration of the warnings of the Founding Fathers and plain history of why America was made from the dangers of a union of church and state. The lessons of history should be plain on this that it must not happen to any extent and that, through many letters, documents, biography and autobiographies of men and women in history, though much persecution from the churches influencing the state and the state influencing the church's why the " separation of church and state" must remain in place.

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 a citizen and student of history, and as Christian, I am extremely 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 and if enacted upon will bring irreversible consequences which will destroy this nation. For it is self evident through history that when the state controls the church such as in communist, China and Russia for a few examples and many more in history or the church controls the State, we can clearly see this now in the Muslim countries what the implications of these would be for this country. For it's in the heart of every man and woman to abuse that power of morality.

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.

The subject of separation of church and state has been presented before in the United States multiple times the most scathing rebuke to it was done in 1888 regarding the Blair bill. Some of the representatives there namely A. T. Jones from the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, must be brought forth and echoed again. It will be fully to the detriment to this country if the removal of separation of church and state is established. We find that there is good intention by the commission , but unknown understanding of the consequences; the dire dread that will come and the complete an absolute destruction of the country, that they’re trying to make great again. Will have the complete and opposite effect in America . It will, America, fall if implemented on. For the separation of church and state must stand or America will fall.

I remain, Yours truly,

[THE UNDERSIGNED]

Chad Marchus Hooper
PII

[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: Sheri Trueblood <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State-Sheri Trueblood
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:45:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Commission for Religious Liberty,

I write as a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, a faith community that has championed religious liberty and freedom of conscience since its founding in the nineteenth century. I appreciate the Commission's desire to strengthen religious freedom in the United States. However, I am deeply concerned by the report's treatment of the principle of separation of church and state.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has consistently affirmed that religious liberty is a God-given right belonging to every person, regardless of faith, creed, or worldview. We believe that genuine faith cannot be compelled by government authority but must be the free response of an individual's conscience to God. For this reason, our Church has long advocated for a clear distinction between the responsibilities of civil government and the mission of the Church.

Our position is rooted in both Scripture and history. Jesus declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Christ consistently refused to establish His kingdom through political power or governmental force. Instead, He invited individuals to follow Him voluntarily, respecting the freedom of conscience that God Himself has given.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when governments favor or support particular religious viewpoints, religious liberty is eventually diminished. Throughout the centuries, alliances between church and state have too often resulted in coercion, persecution, and discrimination against religious minorities. Seventh-day Adventists are especially mindful of this history because our prophetic understanding emphasizes the importance of preserving liberty of conscience and warns against the use of civil authority to enforce religious observance. These convictions have motivated our longstanding commitment to defending the rights of people of every faith —not only our own.

The constitutional principle reflected in the First Amendment has served our nation remarkably well. The government neither establishes religion nor interferes with its free exercise. This neutrality is not hostility toward religion; rather, it protects religion from political manipulation while safeguarding the rights of all citizens equally. It has enabled an extraordinary diversity of religious communities to flourish in America while protecting those whose beliefs differ from the majority.

As I read the Commission's report, I am concerned that its characterization of the separation of church and state could weaken this carefully maintained balance. Government should certainly protect the free exercise of religion and ensure that people of faith are not excluded from public life because of their beliefs. At the same time, government should avoid endorsing, advancing, or privileging religion in ways that compromise its constitutional neutrality or the equal rights of those with differing convictions.

The genius of the American experiment has been that government protects religion best by refraining from governing religion. Likewise, the Church fulfills its mission most faithfully when it depends upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit rather than the authority of the state. This understanding has allowed both religious institutions and civil government to fulfill their distinct God-given roles without compromising one another.

I respectfully urge the Commission to reaffirm the constitutional principles that have preserved religious liberty for more than two centuries. A robust commitment to both the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment

Clause remains the strongest safeguard for freedom of conscience. Protecting these twin principles ensures that every American—whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, atheist, or adherent of any other belief—is equally free to worship, to speak, to serve, or to refrain from religious practice according to the dictates of conscience.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe that authentic faith can never be produced by civil power. It must always remain a free response to God's love. I therefore respectfully ask the Commission to preserve and strengthen the constitutional and moral principles that have made the United States a model of religious liberty throughout the world. My prayers are with you to this end.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

Respectfully,

Sheri Trueblood

From: John Merrick <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty objection
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 06:56:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Friend,

The foundational intent of the First Amendment is to preserve a functional separation between religious institutions and civil authority, a principle our Seventh-day Adventist pioneers defended with unwavering conviction. Leaders like A.T. Jones, E.J. Waggoner, and Ellen G. White taught that any union of church and state violates the very nature of God's government, which respects the free will of every individual. They argued that when the state attempts to legislate religious observance or endorse specific doctrines, it usurps the authority that belongs to God alone and inevitably leads to the coercion of conscience.

Historically, these pioneers stood as a bulwark against movements seeking to amend the Constitution to declare the United States a "Christian nation." A.T. Jones famously testified before Congress that such measures were not merely political errors but spiritual dangers that would transform the republic into an instrument of religious persecution. Ellen G. White reinforced this stance, warning that even a slight union of church and state "brings the church nearer to the world" rather than elevating the nation, ultimately corrupting the purity of the gospel and compromising the church's prophetic witness.

This commitment to separation was not simply a political preference but a prophetic necessity rooted in our understanding of biblical prophecy. The pioneers identified the enforcement of religious laws by the civil power as the fulfillment of the "image of the beast" described in Revelation, where the state enforces the decrees of apostate religion. Consequently, defending the "wall of separation" was viewed as a divine mandate to protect the church from persecution and to delay the final crisis of human history, ensuring that faith remains a voluntary response to God's love rather than a legal obligation.

Today, as we witness increasing efforts to blur the lines between sacred and secular authority, we must echo the urgent appeals of our pioneers to maintain this vital distinction. We cannot afford to trade the principle of religious liberty for the temporary advantage of state endorsement, for history and prophecy alike warn that such a path leads to spiritual bondage and, ultimately, judgment and destruction. Let us therefore stand firm in the conviction that the government must remain neutral in matters of faith, protecting the rights of all citizens to worship—or not to worship—according to the dictates of their own conscience, free from civil interference.

Best regards,
Eric Manikas

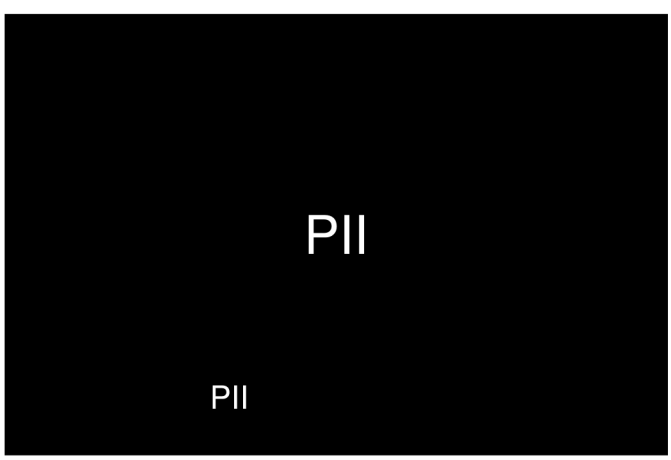
From: Timothy Redberg <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:04:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I agree with the statements brought forth by “Pillar of Freedom” and would like to ask this commission to please NOT create a bridge for church and state, but rather defend the “wall of separation”, and I further request that the commission fully uphold and enforce the Johnson Amendment.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who understands fully that separation of church and state is vital to my religious experience. I have carefully come to understand that when a government begins to create any bridge to try and join church with state, it creates alarms and red flags in my mind. The Catholic Church persecuted for 1260 years during the dark ages from 457 bc to 1798, and many faithful believers were killed, and burned at the stake for their unwillingness to follow the beliefs and coercion of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church even burned bibles and took the Word of God away from believers and banned them from having the freedom to know the Word for themselves in order to keep the people conformed. Any time a Church or Government begins to force or coerce or control any group to do its agenda, it violates Religious Liberty in America. I really believe that a time will come (unfortunately) when the State or the Government will unite with the Church to create a National Sunday Law, and Sabbath keepers will be persecuted for not keeping the current law of the land, and will be blamed for violating this new law. I do not wish this upon my worst enemies. I want there to be a separation of Church and State, so that I may freely worship on the day that I believe is right according to the Word of God, and my conscience. This is just one example of how this “bridge” that your commission is trying to establish will eventually lead to national apostasy, and eventually national ruin. Please understand, that I love the God of the bible, and I believe Jesus would want us to love him freely without force, and any time a Government mixes with Church, it creates persecution. History has taught us well. Let’s continue to let the free will of our God given rights from our Creator to serve and love God influence our decisions in all aspects of our lives.

Sincerely, Tim



From: AJ Norzow <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT - A. NORZOW
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:48:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

Public Comment

Religious Liberty Commission Findings

A. Norzow

To whom it may concern I want to briefly express an unpopular opinion but one that I am non the less entitled.

The 1st amendment of the constitution does not explicitly say there is a separation between the church and the state. However, this does not mean that the principle in not implied. It seems to me that no schoolboy with a competent knowledge of history would agree that there shouldn't be a separation between the church and the state. The church has used the secular powers to punish dissent from it teaching for over a thousand years from 538-1798 AD. Look at the history between the great struggle between the Roman church and the Protestantism.

I know this committee has had the goal of preserving religious liberty for all peoples. I fear that this committee will do the opposite thing it has set out to do. However, I am alarmed to see someone like Dr. Carson who is a Seventh Day Adventist sit on this committee and apparently not bring of the facts from history regarding this subject. As an SDA and an Army veteran myself I have a deep patriotic bone. I love this nation that has been so highly favored of heaven. I am deeply concerned when I see this nation starting to follow in the footsteps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience which are between God and the individual.

I strongly ask the committee to reconsider its conclusion that there is no separation between the church and the state. I fear this will inevitably lead to intolerance and persecution.

Thank you and God bless.
A Norzow

--
You only get I shot a life, so shoot dang good !

From: Richard Clark <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Richard Clark
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:51:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen and a Seventh-Day Adventist I am writing to urge you to revise your recommendations that bridge the constitutionally mandated separation between state and church. Specifically, I oppose using public taxpayer money to fund religious non-profit activities, funding religious clubs or education on public campuses, and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

The founding documents of this nation make it clear that the justification for the existence of its government is to secure the rights of the people. The Constitution states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". The neutrality of the state in matters of personal conscience is not an attack on religion. It is the means of preserving it. For a more detailed account of the historical context of religious liberty please refer to the public comment on this topic submitted to the RLC by Pillar of Freedom.

Government funding of religious activities removes this neutrality. Are funds to be granted without questioning if the religious activities align with government interest? If so, this violates governmental duty to taxpayers. As a person of faith, I do not wish to force a non-believer to fund causes I believe in. Nor as a taxpayer do I wish to fund religious activities that violate my personal beliefs. On the other hand, if the government funding is allocated to religious organizations whose views align with the current administration sentiment, then government is preferentially helping establish certain religions in direct violation of the 1st Amendment. In turn, church doctrine will inevitably be diluted and distorted to fit civil wishes in order to secure more funding. In either case, public funding would be detrimental to both religion and state. This nation was founded by people who fled the persecution of a merged state and church. 250 years later we cannot make the mistake of thinking this time the outcome of such a merger will be different.

A similar issue exists when public campuses fund or worse require religious activities. States such as Texas are pushing to display the Ten Commandments from the Bible in public schools. While this is popular locally due to majority opinion, majority rule is a dangerous precedent to set. There is no liberty if minority opinions are not preserved. Yet it is impossible for a school to display the religious texts of every belief held by its student body. Nor is it the duty of a public school to instruct students in matters of conscience. To do so is to establish a preferred religion, in direct violation of the Constitution. While it is true campuses have become hostile to believers and have overly espoused secularism, the solution is not to actively promote religion. The only solution is to return to true neutrality.

Finally, I am disturbed by the call to repeal the Johnson Amendment. Partisan politics has no place in religion. As it is, there is nothing preventing a church from counseling members on how doctrine impacts specific issues such as abortion or marriage. To allow active religious organizational campaigning not only cheapens and degrades church life but opens up an avenue of corruption where churches endorse a candidate in exchange for preferential funding of their organizational activities. It is the civic duty of every church member to vote according to their personal conscience. The current system under the Johnson Amendment is perfectly adequate. There is no benefit to either state of church in repealing it. I would urge the opposite: fully enforce the Johnson Amendment.

To close, there is no matter of personal conscience more important than the right to worship (or abstain from worship) as one sees fit. The United States has preserved this better than any nation in history through careful checks and balances that separate powers. The recommendations of the Religious Liberty Commission threaten these checks and balances. I urge the members to reconsider their positions on government funding of religious activities, education, and the Johnson Amendment.

Thank you!
Richard Clark

From: dannalonna <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 07:59:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm a Seventh-day Adventist and agree with Pillar Of Freedom's comments.
We believe in Religious Liberty for you, and for everyone!

Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Sincerely,
Daniel Petsch

From: Skyler Spellman <[redacted]>
To: Rlc <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Skyler Spellman
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:02:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I appreciate the commission's desire to protect and help Americans of faith. I agree that our beautiful nation was founded on people of faith and that without this, the freedoms we enjoy would never have been possible.

With that being said, it is important to recognize just why these freedoms have been so successful for so many years. Many of our founders understood that they were forming something different than what they had come from in Europe. Not only would this be a land of civil freedom, it would also be a land of religious freedom. It is these two freedoms that have made this nation truly great and a marvel in history that God had blessed us with.

The founders understood the precarious nature of what they were building and how easy it would be for it to be corrupted or lost if not protected. They understood that a people can only truly be given the freedom of self-government if they were willing and able to govern themselves. Many understood that a free people must, by necessity, be a moral or virtuous people. They also understood a virtuous people does not happen by chance. A virtuous people can only come when those people are a people of faith. The Great Awakening played a crucial role in preparing the American people to be independent and self-governing.

But there was one last piece of the puzzle that was needed. They understood that the only way a people could truly have faith was not to enforce that faith, which at best would create hypocrisy in the church, but to allow faith to be free according to the dictates of conscience in matters of worship.

And so the recipe for freedom is a triangle. Freedom rests upon virtue and virtue upon faith and faith upon freedom. If any of these falls, they all will eventually fall.

I believe the intentions of the commission were probably very good, but I think their conclusions endanger the above. They claim there is no wall of separation between church and state and that they would like to build a bridge between the two. I'm certain the commission has no desire to enforce worship upon anyone, but the principles of building a bridge between church and state is certainly a path that will lead to trouble for the church.

The power of the state is the "sword" and the power of the church is the "word." But as soon as there is any kind of marriage between the church and the state, the temptation is for the church to rely less and less on the word and more and more on the sword. Church history sadly shows that this has been the norm instead of the exception. The genius and beauty of America has been the keeping of these two separate so as to not corrupt either one. And this is established by Jesus Himself when He declared that we should "render to Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's." This shows a clear demarcation between the authority of Caesar and the authority of God. There are some things that belong to God that Caesar has no right to touch. These are matters of conscience that the state doesn't have the right to weigh in on as to who is right. Caesar's role is to keep the civil order and to protect the freedom of conscience for the church. He has no role in spiritual matters beyond this. When we build a bridge between these two lawful authorities, we immediately corrupt them both.

The wall of separation is there to keep the church pure and the founders of this system understood this. They knew these two powers needed to be separate to protect our freedom here in this country.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist and as such I keep the seventh day of the week holy according to the fourth commandment. This is a minority view in this country but one I consider vital to my faith as I want to obey all

ten of Jesus' commandments as He spoke them with His own voice and wrote them with His own finger. I have greatly benefited from the freedom I have in this country to be able to have Sabbaths off at work and be able to do my business on the first day of the week. I am just one of many who hold conscientious views that differ from the majority and I think it is very important to preserve this freedom, not only for myself, but for the faith of the country on which our self-government rests.

Furthermore Bible prophecy, especially Revelation 13, shows that one day believers will be coerced in the area of worship by two "beasts" or governing powers. We want to be a righteous nation and that cannot be if we coerce in matters of conscience as these beasts will do. Let's not open the door for religious persecution by building a bridge between church and state.

Thank you for hearing my voice and may God bless our nation is my prayer.

Sincerely,

Skyler Spellman

Aberdeen, SD

From: Yvette Filteau <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty (Hereinafter "RLC") Draft Report, Issued June 2026
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:02:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

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

I am a Seventh-day Adventist who loves and faithfully observes the biblical Sabbath from Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, as established at Creation (Genesis 2:1–3), commanded in the Fourth Commandment written by the finger of God (Exodus 20:8–11), kept by Jesus Himself (Luke 4:16, 31), and faithfully observed by His followers (Acts 13:13–16, 42, 44).

The preservation of the separation of church and state is essential to protecting religious liberty and preventing the government from favoring one religion over another. History repeatedly demonstrates that when church and state become intertwined, the result is often religious persecution. This is precisely what our Founding Fathers sought to prevent. Having witnessed the religious oppression that plagued Europe, many of the early settlers came to America seeking the freedom to worship according to their conscience.

The rallying cry, "No King, No Pope," reflected the American Revolution's rejection of both British political rule and religious interference in civil government. Our Founding Fathers understood the importance of safeguarding liberty of conscience. I believe they would be deeply troubled by the direction our nation is taking today.

As President Ulysses S. Grant wisely stated, "Keep the Church and the State forever separate."

I respectfully and humbly ask that you withdraw this bill. While it may be well-intentioned, I believe it would ultimately do more harm than good by setting a precedent that could lead to serious and far-reaching consequences for religious freedom.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A proud American
Yvette Filteau
Sent from my iPhone

From: Donella Smith <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:06:10 -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. 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 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."

As citizens and students of history, and as Christians, there is cause for alarm 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.

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 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.

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."

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.

I 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.

Sincerely,

Concerned member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church

From: Joy Baumann <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Building the bridge between church and the state/government
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:11:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone
I am a Bible believing Protestant Christian. No, I do not agree with the proposal to join church with the government-I oppose it. There is good reason why America has kept them separate - and it is still a necessary. When the church receives power from the government history tells us persecution follows. It was when the Jewish religious leaders went to Pilot the Roman governor that they got the power to crucify Jesus. Modern history has the same stories. The Waldenses, the Huguenots, the Protestants of the 1500's, and during the Blue Laws of our country some Adventist's were arrested and put in chain gangs. We have many beliefs in America our worship and when we worship is between us and God. John 18:36 "Jesus says: My kingdom is not of this world."
Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25 all tell us to give to Caesar what is his and to God what is His. Two governing bodies - the state and the God of the universe. Romans 13:1-9
Paul explains just what we are to obey from our governments…it is the last six commandments of the Decalogue ….the first four are our personal responsibility to God alone. In John 14:1-3 Jesus has promised to come again and take us to heaven. No leader, church, or government can do that for us-but Christ only.
Our allegiance in the matter of worship-when and how must be under the direction of God alone. Please do not implement this proposal!
I an a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Thank you for the opportunity to respond in this matter. Joy Baumann

From: Linda <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- Separation of Church and State - Linda Brehm
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:41:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

Email: [redacted]

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Linda Brehm

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen of the United States of America I am greatly alarmed. The title of this commission is "Presidential Religious Liberty Commission" but it is obvious to me that while they want to talk about Religious Liberty they really don't have a clear understanding of the history of the United States or have left out significant parts of our history to suit their bias.

The wall of separation was well understood by our founders because they had witnessed the persecution of those who didn't go along with a state church. Whenever church and state are united, persecution always results for those who disagree.

The commission has demonstrated their lack of understanding of the term in their treatment of Carrie Projean who they threw off their commission for what they believed to be anti-Semitism when in fact she was questioning whether opposition to Zionism made Catholics antisemetic. The Commissions own conduct toward her demonstrates the need for separation of church and state and true religious liberty. The uniting of church and state leads to the State being forced to decide religious doctrine which in turn leads to religious persecution.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and my concerns are:

1. Do not repeal the Johnson amendment.
2. Do not fund religious non-profit activities or expand funding to them.
3. Do not give special treatment to the government of Israel.
4. I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them. (pillaroffreedom.org).

The separation of church and state is what has made the United States special and free. Let's keep it that way.

Sincerely,

Linda Brehm

Milton Freewater, Oregon

From: Pilgrim07 <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:48:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am troubled by some thoughts expressed in the recent draft report and would respectfully like to bring the following to the Commission's attention.

I request that the Johnson Amendment be fully upheld and enforced.

I am opposed to the use of government funding for religious education or religious clubs on public campuses.

I am opposed to the use of government funding for religious non-profit activities.

I am requesting that the Constitution continue to be interpreted as it was intended by the Founding Fathers in the days when it was written.

I ask the Commission to dedicate time to studying the history of the state of Rhode Island, and the influence of Roger Williams in its founding.

I also ask that the Commission review the teachings of Thomas Helwys, George W. Truett, John Leland and Isaac Backus, amongst others.

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian who loves Jesus Christ, and uses the Holy Scriptures as my rule of faith and practice.

In Matthew 22:21, Jesus Christ Himself describes for us the relation between church and state.

"…Then said He unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Matt. 22:21

Revelation 19:16 makes it clear that Jesus Christ, as our Creator and Redeemer, is the Highest Authority above any and all political or state authorities. His Word has supreme authority, and takes precedence above any or all human ideologies.

We have on record His statement in Matthew 22:21 that there should be a clear and distinct difference between the church and the state.

Thank you for considering these points, and for maintaining a separation of church and state, as expressed by Jesus Christ Himself.

Sherri Neuroh

From: Gabriel Radvan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State / Repeal of Johnson Amendment – Gabriel Radvan
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:48:35 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to submit my formal public comment regarding the newly released draft of the Religious Liberty Commission Report.

As a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I am deeply alarmed by the report's recommendations, specifically those aimed at dismantling the wall of separation between church and state and advocating for the repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

History has proven time and again that whenever the church seeks political power and merges with the state, liberty of conscience is the first casualty. A union between church and state has never resulted in true religious freedom; instead, it has invariably led to the weaponization of religion, institutionalized bigotry, and the persecution of religious minorities who do not conform to the state-sanctioned orthodoxy.

The Johnson Amendment serves as a vital safeguard that protects both the purity of the gospel and the integrity of our democracy. Allowing houses of worship to become political weapons compromises the pulpit, divides congregations over partisan politics, and invites government overreach into matters of faith.

From a Seventh-day Adventist prophetic and historical perspective, breaking down this wall of separation sets a dangerous precedent. We firmly believe that the erosion of these constitutional boundaries will ultimately pave the way for a National Sunday Law, forcing state-mandated worship and stripping citizens of their God-given right to freedom of conscience.

The federal government must maintain absolute secular neutrality and uphold the traditional Establishment Clause. I urge the Commission to reject any policies that invite a union between church and state. True religious liberty means protecting the right of every individual to worship—or not worship—according to their own conscience, entirely free from government coercion or favoritism.

Respectfully submitted,

Gabriel Radvan

VALRICO, FL

From: Ruth Ann Parker <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 08:55:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Liberty is "the power and right to act, think, and speak freely without external control, oppression, or arbitrary restrictions." It encompasses both the absence of interference and the possession of fundamental human civil rights.

The United States of America is "the land of the free." Why, then is there even a conversation about the people's choice of how to worship our God?

If God himself, our Creator, does not force anyone to worship the way He outlines in His Holy Word, who is man to dictate his own interpretation of how to worship?

The Bible clearly tells in Acts 5:29 that we ought to obey God rather than men. The Ten Commandments clearly tell us how to obey God, and He himself tells us to "CHOOSE" whom we will follow.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe in following God's law as outlined in His Holy Word, and I also believe in the God given freedom of choice. I pray that you will protect that freedom.

Respectfully submitted,
Ruth Parker from Ohio

From: Mindy Steele <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Mindy Steele
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:10:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of Religious Liberty Commission,

I am very concerned by the recommendations in your recent Draft Report to the President.
Specifically, I am alarmed that you would suggest measures to lessen the separation of church and state by using government funding to support religious institutions and by repealing the Johnson Amendment.
I believe my fear is well founded that those who control the money also control the institution. As an American and a Seventh Day Adventist Christian, I don't want my government controlling my church or my beliefs. Religious freedom is what has set our nation apart and is why I'm still proud to be an American even though I disagree with many of our government's decisions!

Furthermore, I am disappointed by your special treatment of Jewish people and the state of Israel as a whole. We should respect all people groups, but I feel that Israel has brainwashed members of our country into thinking that no matter what they do to the people of Gaza it is OK because somehow they are special. Don't let them control us! Stand up for truth and justice instead of protecting them just because of their historical roots.

I am praying that you will make decisions that will keep our country strong for many more years!

Sincerely,

Mindy Steele

From: Deborah Howlett <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the Draft Report issued June 26, 2026 by the "RLC"
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:15:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a Seventh-Day Adventist , and as such I deeply cherish the Biblical Sabbath, the sacred seventh day of the week - Saturday which God has called us to keep holy. I also love the United States of America and the principles upon which it was founded. The United States has been uniquely blessed by God, becoming a refuge for those fleeing other countries where their God given freedom of choice and liberty to worship according to Scripture and freedoms were restricted by the state.

History repeatedly proves that whenever civil government involves itself in the religious practices of its people - persecution inevitably follows.

Our forefathers understood these dangers well. That is why the First Amendment by The Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause states as follows : "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" U.S Const. Amend. 1 cl 1.

The purpose is obvious that these clauses in the First Amendment were to keep church and state separate and that the two are not mingled by a "bridge" or otherwise. Religious Liberty cannot exist without the separation of church and state. Liberty of conscience is the fundamental right of every individual to follow their own moral and religious beliefs without coercion, interference or punishment by the government or its society. The separation of church and state is vitally and critically important to preserve and protect every individuals' freedom to think, believe and act according to own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority. No own should ever be forced to act against or penalized for their sincere beliefs.

I respectfully request the Commission to:

1) Reconsider, retract and redraft its report
2) Reconsider and reject any interpretation of the US Constitution that diminishes, dismisses or denigrates the historic separation of church and state and to maintain proper boundaries between the state and government authority and matters of conscience to preserve liberty of conscience
3) Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities
4) Withdraw any recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment, and
5) Consider fully enforcing the Johnson Amendment, which would restrict the political activities of churches.

Thank you for consideration of these objections and recommendations,

Deborah Howlett

From: Loraine Peart <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT- ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE- Loraine Peart
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:19:16 -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.

As a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian who reads both history and the Bible, I believe my position preserves liberty of conscience for all, regardless of their religious persuasion. My reasons are these:

Religious liberty is a right, not a majority's permission.
The Religious Liberty Library tract (1893) on the limits of civil authority put the definition 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 is not instituted to serve the majority's preferences in religion; it is instituted to protect the minority, since the majority can already protect itself at the ballot box. When Senator Blair told Alonzo T Jones in 1888 that most Americans favored Sunday legislation, Jones answered that the people, however numerous, have no right to invade another's relationship to God. Congress itself said as much in 1829, when its own committee declared that the Constitution regards the conscience of the Jew as sacred as that of the Christian, and gives no more authority to bind the conscience of one solitary individual than that of a whole community. Numbers cannot manufacture a right to legislate religion, because religion was never submitted to a vote.

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. In other words, any such law must define whose religion it favors, and the man who consents to legislation favoring his own creed resigns his right to change his mind later, should he become persuaded some other faith is nearer the truth. That is a quiet but real loss of liberty even for the winners of such laws, and it should give any believer pause before welcoming government sponsorship.

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 and a representative is chosen to guard the rights of man, not to restrict the rights of conscience" The House report warned that if government defines one point of religious duty, it may with equal propriety define every part of divine revelation. That is not a modern court's opinion; it is Congress describing its own proper limits while men who had lived through the founding still sat in its halls.

Force can make hypocrites, never Christians — and state sponsorship corrupts the faith it favors. In James Madison's book entitled "Memorial Remonstrance against Religious Assesments he shared a survey of almost 15 centuries in which the legal establishment of Christianity was on trial and found that in all places there was "pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, [and] in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution." James Madison went on to say "enquire of the Teachers of Christianity for the ages in which it (Christianity) appeared in its greatest lustre; those of every sect, point to the ages prior to its incorporation with Civil policy"

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.”

Respectfully
Loraine Peart

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: Sharon McKeown <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Sharon McKeown
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:22:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a person of faith, it is troubling to read that the Commission's report supports tearing down the wall of separation between church and state. This important principle was established to allow for both the church and the state to be free from one controlling the other. As a citizen and a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian I ask you please to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state —- especially repealing the Johnson amendment and using government money to fund religious activities.

Government assistance or funding to churches would create a situation where the churches conform to government requirements rather than follow God's counsel. This would not be good for the churches or the government.

Keep the wall of separation between church and state for a strong country. Maintain freedom of conscience for those who believe, as well as those who do not believe. Atheism and unbelief are religions as well as Christianity. God Himself gives all men the freedom to choose who they worship. He calls us to worship Him according to the truths of His Word, yet He gives to all the right to choose. He forces no one. Continue this fundamental freedom, support the principles that have kept our country strong, and strengthen the wall between church and state.

Sincerely,
Sharon McKeown

From: Leonel Gomez <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:23:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

As a concern, U.S. citizen, and a Christian member of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, I am asking the commission to reconsider the recommendation listed on page 214 of the Religious Liberty Commission draft report:

1. ensuring that faith-based groups may compete for federal grants, funds, and contracts on an equal playing field with secular groups without being forced to give up their religious identity or cease ministering according to their beliefs;
2. creating a robust system of universal school choice

It appears that the Religious Liberty Commission went through long lengths in listening and recording individuals stories whose "Religious Rights" suffered. I commend the commission for patiently lending their ears and listening to individual grievances. As stated on the second paragraph, page 12, of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report, "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."

The founder of Providence, Rhode Island colony, Roger Williams, clearly understood that Religious Freedom (Freedom of Conscious) was, and continues to be, "a vital component of a flourishing society."

Providence Rhode Island was the first government of any jurisdiction established with full religious freedom. The church will not mingle in the affairs of the government and vice-versa. The citizens of Providence committed themselves to a complex religious liberty by signing the 1640 Agreement: "We agree, as formerly hath been the liberties of the town, so still to hold forth, liberty of conscious." With such simple phrase, the colony at Rhode Island agreed to conduct civil business without regard to the religious views of the citizens." In other words, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's…" Past World History events has demonstrated that the moment church affairs mingled with government affairs or vice versa, such as, school funding, creating a universal choice, and repealing the Johnson Amendment, government agencies run the risk of opening a Pandora Box.

Protecting the rights of Religious Liberty is a sound and noble act, but creating a bridge between church and state would weaken the original intention of the nation's fathers:

1. Government of the people by the people, i.e. a republic
2. Religious freedom, i.e. separation of church and state

Respectfully,

Leonel Gomez
Oxnard, CA.

From: Jeffery Chan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:32:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

My name is Jeffery Chan. I write as a Christian, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, and an American citizen who deeply values both religious faith and the constitutional protection of religious liberty.

I respectfully urge the Commission to reaffirm the constitutional principle that government must neither establish nor favor any religion while fully protecting the free exercise of religion for all people. Although the exact phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, the principle is firmly rooted in the First Amendment, Article VI, and the long-standing constitutional tradition of protecting liberty of conscience.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when political power and religious authority become intertwined, both religion and civil liberty suffer. Roger Williams wisely observed that civil magistrates are not "judges, governors, or defenders" of spiritual matters, and that Christ never directed His followers to rely upon the civil government to advance His kingdom.

Jesus Himself declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). He transformed lives through truth, love, compassion, and voluntary faith—not through governmental authority or coercion. As Christians, we should seek to influence society through faithful witness and loving service rather than through the power of the state.

The separation of church and state is not hostility toward religion. Instead, it protects religion from political manipulation while safeguarding every person's freedom to believe, worship, or not worship according to conscience. This principle has allowed people of many different faiths—and those with none—to live together peacefully under equal protection of the law.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I belong to a faith tradition that has long defended liberty of conscience for all people, regardless of their religious beliefs. We ask the government to protect the religious freedom of everyone equally, not to promote one faith above another. Such equal protection reflects both the Constitution and the Golden Rule: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

I respectfully encourage the Commission to ensure that its final report strengthens the constitutional safeguards that preserve religious liberty for every American and resists any recommendations that could blur the proper distinction between religious institutions and governmental authority.

Thank you for considering my comments and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

Jeffery Chan

From: "PII" <PII>
To: "PII" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Bernard Jaeger
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:49:30 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: image001.jpg; image003.png; image002.png; image004.png; image005.png; image006.png

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Commission members:

In 1888, Seventh-day Adventist leader Alonzo T. Jones delivered a famous argument to the U.S. Senate Committee on Education and Labor against Senator Henry W. Blair's proposed National Sunday Rest Bill. Jones argued that enforcing religious observance was unconstitutional and antichristian, asserting that civil government cannot legislate morality.

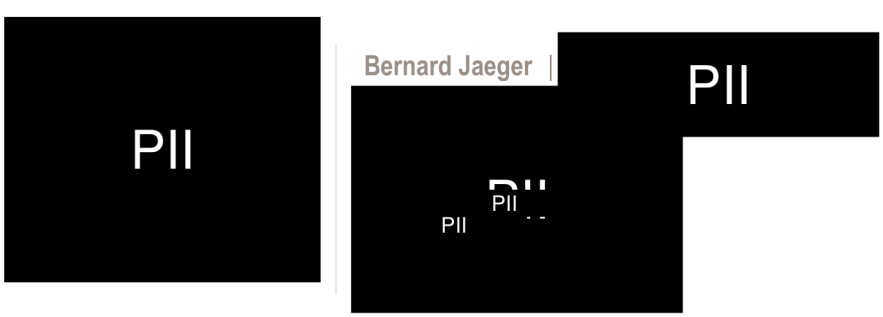
Key Arguments and History

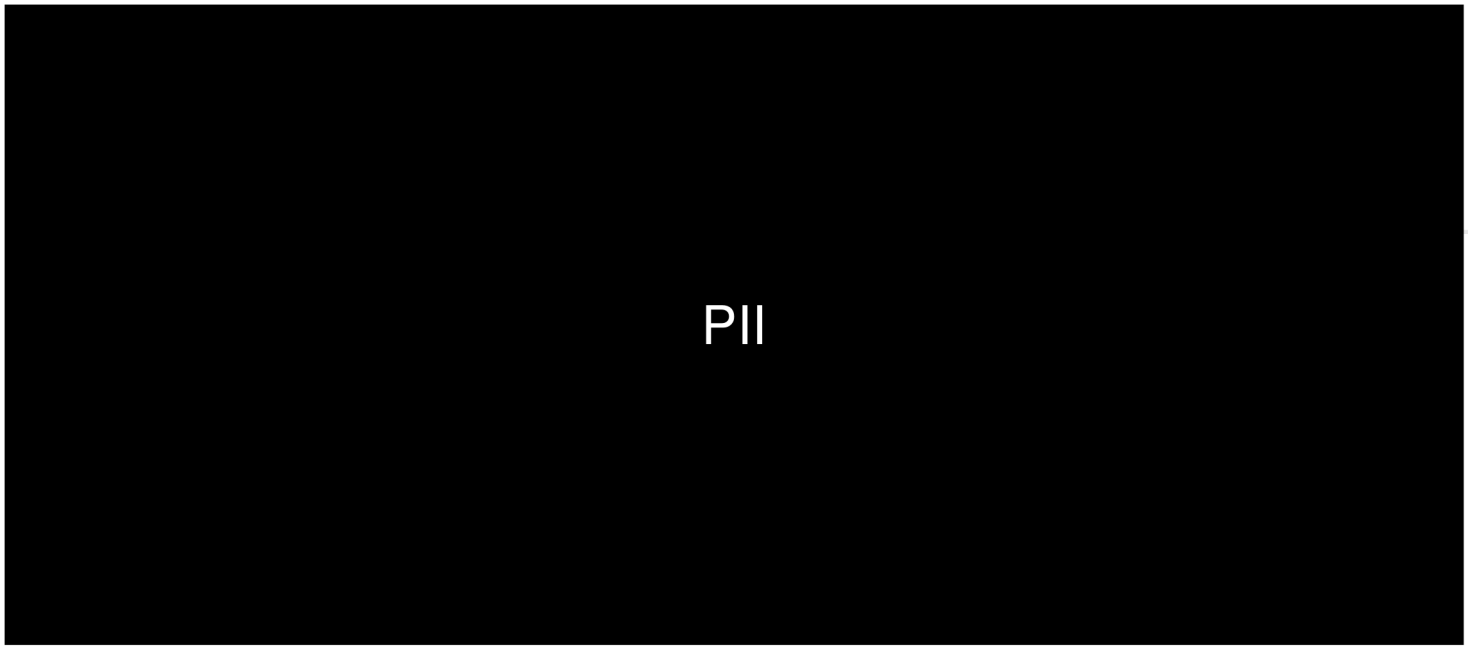
- **The Congressional Hearing:** On December 13, 1888, Jones fiercely debated Senator Blair, stating that the government has no authority to legislate the "first table of the law" (duties toward God).
- **The "Antichristian" Stance:** Jones famously declared that any Sunday law—whether state or national—is inherently antichristian because civil governments should not mandate religious practices.
- **Historical Precedents:** Jones referenced the Roman Emperor Constantine's original Sunday law from 321 AD to argue that state-sponsored religious legislation always leads to the infringement of individual civil liberties.
- **The Alliance:** By opposing the Sunday-rest legislation, Adventists found themselves in a temporary and unconventional coalition with Jewish groups, secularists, and saloon owners who also had reasons to oppose Sunday closings.

Legacy and Modern Context

Jones's defense was widely published as "The National Sunday Law" and remains a foundational text for Adventist perspectives on the separation of church and state. While Senator Blair's 50th Congress bill ultimately died, modern debates regarding Christian nationalism, religious liberty, and the proper scope of civil law continue to echo these historical arguments.

Please do not repeat the problem issues of the past. Regards.




PII

From: Irene Hill <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Irene Hill
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 09:54:21 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am greatly troubled by the recommendations coming forth from your committee. I am especially concerned about the potential impact of government funding of religious activities. I have observed within the educational system that federal funding comes with strings attached and is eventually used to coerce compliance with federal “guidelines." Government monies have no place in religious organizations.

I have always appreciated the Johnson Amendment that preserves the church from the scourge of campaigning. In recent years it seems to be not acknowledged or enforced. Rather than repealing the Johnson Amendment, please reconsider supporting and strengthening it.

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom’s comments below. Please implement them.

Sincerely,
Irene Hill
Appleton, Washington

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

DOJ-RLC Comment-020275

these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020278

of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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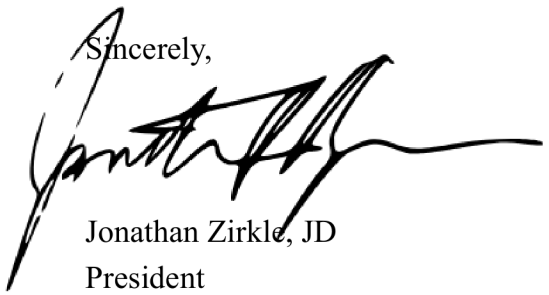
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020287

From: Eric Dingman <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:18:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom this may concern:

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen and a Seventh-day Adventist father of five to express my strong support for the continued separation of church and state.

The concept of separation of church and state was implemented specifically to protect the individual beliefs of many faiths. Abolishing this aspect of our constitutional rights creates the potential for us to lose our fundamental religious freedoms. I urge you to reconsider any stance that would move away from this principle, as our forefathers specifically established our Constitution to avoid the religious persecution they fled when leaving Great Britain.

Our forefathers risked their lives for the right of every individual to practice their own religious beliefs. I ask that you do not undo this constitutional right, as I believe doing so would begin the unraveling of the unity that makes up the United States of America.

Thank you for your time and for considering my perspective on this vital issue.

Sincerely,

Eric Dingman

From: Tim Rumsey <[redacted]>
To: "RLC" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE – Lake of the Ozarks Seventh-Day Adventist Church
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:21:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13, 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

We appreciate the time and effort that the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission has put forth to preserve and protect religious liberty in the United States. Since this nation commonly sets the standard for freedom in other countries of the world, we recognize that the conclusions and recommendations of the Commission are consequential for people in all parts of the world. We appreciate also the opportunity for public comment before the Commission's final report is released. We agree with many statements and conclusions found in the Draft Report, including concern over recent attacks on religious liberty that have come from secular and woke ideologies. However, we are concerned with the Commission's attempt to weaken and dismantle the concept of the "wall of separation between church and state" as the solution to counter and stop these attacks.

On page 42, the Draft Report states, "Jefferson had coined the phrase 'wall of separation' in a private letter to the Danbury Baptists to delineate that the state could not establish a religion." This statement overlooks or ignores numerous earlier uses of this metaphor. The concept of a wall of separation between church and state was clearly expressed at least as far back as 1648 by John Williams in his treatise *The Bloody Tenant of Persecution*. He wrote,

"[T]he faithful labours of many witnesses of Jesus Christ, extant to the world, abundantly proving, that the church of the Jews under the Old Testament in the type, and the church of the Christians under the New Testament in the antitype, were both separate from the world; and that when they have opened a gap in the hedge, or wall of separation, between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God hath ever broke down the wall itself, removed the candlestick, &c. and made his garden a wilderness, as at this day. And that therefore if he will ever please to restore his garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be walled in peculiarly unto himself from the world, and that all that shall be saved out of the world are to be transplanted out of the wilderness of the world, and added unto his church or garden."[1]

Nine years before the Declaration of Independence was signed, and twenty-four years before the Constitution's Bill of Rights was ratified, the Scottish-born politician and political theorist James Burgh similarly argued that free societies should "Build an impenetrable wall of separation between things sacred and civil."[2] The writings of both Williams and Burgh were well known to the founding fathers, including James Madison, who likewise argued for the "separation between religion and government."[3] Therefore, the Report's suggestion that the metaphor of a wall of separation between church and state was a private invention of Thomas Jefferson is historically misleading. On the contrary, the metaphor was in use long before Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Dansbury Baptists.

The Commission correctly observed that the phrase "wall of separation" does not appear in the Constitution. However, this does not mean that the writers of the Constitution did not intend to guarantee a separation of church and state. Such an intent actually conforms with the broader purpose of the Constitution to provide an effective and enduring separation of governmental power into distinct parts. James Madison, chief architect of the Constitution, wrote that "[t]he accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny."[4] In a letter to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson echoed a similar sentiment when he wrote, "The principle of the Constitution is that of a separation of Legislative, Executive and Judiciary functions, except in cases specified. If this principle be not expressed in direct terms, it is clearly the spirit of the Constitution, and it ought to be so commented and acted on by every friend of free government."[5] To admit that the nation's founders recognized the need to separate powers within government, yet claim that these same men did not seek to provide for the separation of church and state, suggests historical carelessness.

Numerous United States Presidents have repeated and endorsed the importance of the separation of church and state. President Fillmore said, "I would be tolerant to men of all creeds, but would exact from all faithful allegiance to our republican institutions. But if any sect or denomination, ostensibly organized for religious purposes, should use that organization, or suffer it to be used,

for political objects, I would meet it by political opposition. In my view, Church and State should be separate, not only in form, but fact—religion and politics should not be mingled."[6]

Ulysses Grant said, "Leave the matter of religion to the family circle, the church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contribution. Keep the Church and State forever separate."[7] Upon his nomination, James Garfield said, "Whatever help the nation can justly afford should be generously given to aid the States in supporting common schools; but it would be unjust to our people and dangerous to our institutions to apply any portion of the revenues of the nation, or of the States, to the support of sectarian schools. The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[8] In the same vein, Theodore Roosevelt wrote, "Washington and his associates believed that it was essential to the existence of this Republic that there should never be any union of Church and State; and such union is partially accomplished wherever a given creed is aided by the State or when any public servant is elected or defeated because of his creed. The Constitution explicitly forbids the requiring of any religious test as a qualification for holding office. To impose such a test by popular vote is as bad as to impose it by law. To vote either for or against a man because of his creed is to impose upon him a religious test and is a clear violation of the spirit of the Constitution.…I hold that in this country there must be complete severance of Church and State; that public moneys shall not be used for the purpose of advancing any particular creed; and therefore that the public schools shall be nonsectarian and no public moneys appropriated for sectarian schools."[9]

Of concern also are recommendations found in the Draft Report that would allow tax-funded government financial support for faith-based non-profits[10] and religious education,[11] open the door to politicization of churches and religious non-profits by repealing the Johnson Amendment,[12] potentially indoctrinate Americans in the ideology of the Commission,[13] and provide increased vigilance against anti-Semitism with no mention of the need to protect the religious liberty rights of other faiths and religious minorities.[14]

History has proven that government-provided funding often brings with it explicit or implicit pressure to conform to government policies, standards, and ideologies. This was demonstrated during the global pandemic in the early 2020s when educational institutions and healthcare organizations—among many other entities—experienced intense pressure to deny religious liberty exemptions to those opposed to receiving the heavily-promoted vaccines. The Commission acknowledged the negative results of this government-funded pressure on page 222 of the Draft Report: "The Commission recommends that the Department of Health and Human Services' and Department of Justice's Offices of Civil Rights, along with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission open civil rights investigations into—or file strategic litigation against—federally funded educational, medical, and governmental entities that may have violated religious freedom rights by denying religious exemptions to vaccine mandates." While the Commission rightfully recognizes the negative effects that government funding has exercised in the public health arena, it fails to admit the potential danger that government funding of distinctly religious activities could have in the religious arena. These potential dangers should be considered and the related recommendations modified accordingly.

Since 1954, the Johnson Amendment has forbidden 501(c)3 non-profits, which includes most churches, from endorsing or opposing political candidates.[15] It has served as a barrier against the "buying" of religious votes by politicians and the undue influence of faith leaders and religious organizations on the political process. Simultaneously, religious leaders must remain free to discuss public policies that deal with moral issues and address questions of justice without fear of intimidation and retaliation. The Commission rightly recognizes the danger posed by too close of a relationship between ecclesiastical and political power when it warns against "advocating 'theocracy'."[16] The Johnson Amendment has been and should continue to be an effective safeguard against the development of such a situation in the United States.

We are opposed to the above-mentioned recommendations and statements in the Draft Report because we believe they open the door to exactly the kind of religious coercion and oppression that the Commission seeks to avoid. The report states on page 42 that "the government may not take over the functions of a church or coerce religious observance." We agree. Minimizing the importance of the separation of church and state while simultaneously indoctrinating Americans into the Commission's interpretation of religious liberty, promoting government funding of religious organizations in general, and protecting one specific religious viewpoint (Zionism) without mention of the rights of other religions or religious minorities, could set the stage for unintended and unforeseen consequences. This has happened previously in the United States.

For example, in the nineteenth century, Sunday "blue laws" were revived and enforced in many places in an effort to counter the rise of commerce and amusement that was turning Sunday, the "Christian Sabbath," into a normal, non-religious work and play day. As a result, numerous religious minorities, especially Sabbatarians such as Seventh-day Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and Orthodox and Traditional Jews, were forced to choose between their faith and their jobs, as the laws essentially took away their livelihood for two days a week.

Much more recently, and within a different setting, the Religious Liberty Commission itself apparently removed one of its own Commissioners for voicing questions about the necessity of America and American Christians to support Zionism.[17] In an interview with Tucker Carlson, Carrie Prejean Boller described her ousting from the Commission on February 11, 2026, after expressing her own religious convictions about the matter. Such examples demonstrate how quickly and easily religious liberty can disappear even in a country that espouses to value freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and freedom of worship.

For all of these reasons, we request the Religious Liberty Commission to relate the history of religious liberty accurately and the separation of church and state in the United States and to substantially revise its recommendations that would weaken or remove the "wall of separation." In doing so, we believe the Commission will more closely accomplish its objective to help ensure the continued protection of religious liberty and liberty of conscience in this country and worldwide.

Submitted respectfully,
Members of the Lake of the Ozarks Seventh-day Adventist Church

Donnalene Beardsley
Michele Cansler
Wendell Cansler
Laurice Edmonds
Wesley Edmonds
Lois Moore
Stacey Rumsey
Tim Rumsey

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[1]
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[3]
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[9]
Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1916), p. 359, 361; accessed July 12, 2026 at https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.273195
[10]
Draft Report on page 14, "Guarantee faith-based institutions an equal opportunity to participate on an equal basis in funding opportunities without requiring them to renounce their religious identity; issue guidance that religious discrimination in federal funding programs is unconstitutional."
[11]
Draft Report on page 15, "Ensure the constitutional guarantees of religious liberty and parental rights are enjoyed by families of all socioeconomic means by promoting a robust and universal system of school choice where funding follows the child."
[12]
Draft Report on page 23, "Repeal the Johnson Amendment which purports to give the government authority to regulate religious leaders' sermons and spiritual guidance to their communities."
[13]
Draft Report on page 22, "Instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state."
[14]
Draft Report on page 23, "Combat anti-Semitism through enforcement of civil rights laws, litigation of credible allegations of anti-Semitic discrimination and violence, and civic education."
[15]
26 U.S.C.§501(c)(3)
[16]
Draft Report on page 42, "To be clear, this does not involve or require advocating"theocracy" or even the total elimination of any separation between church and state."
[17]
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31Lhq-QlP8s

From: Doug Schoch <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Douglas Schoch
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:22:59 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I am writing to respectfully express my concern regarding any recommendation to reinterpret the Establishment Clause in a way that weakens the historic separation of church and state. I believe such a change would depart from both the intent of the First Amendment and the biblical principle that matters of conscience belong to God, not to civil government.

The First Amendment protects religious liberty through two complementary safeguards. The Establishment Clause prevents the government from exercising authority over religion, while the Free Exercise Clause guarantees every individual's right to worship—or not worship—according to conscience. Together, these protections have made the United States a remarkable example of religious freedom.

The founders understood that faith and government each have important but distinct roles. Thomas Jefferson described this relationship as a "wall of separation between church and state," expressing a principle already embodied in the Constitution. James Madison argued that religion can only be directed by reason and conviction, never by force, and later observed that both religion and government remain purer when they are kept separate. Benjamin Franklin likewise recognized that genuine faith should rest on truth and persuasion rather than the power of the state.

This understanding is also consistent with Scripture. Jesus' instruction to "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" establishes a distinction between civil authority and the authority of conscience. Government has a vital role in preserving justice and protecting the rights of all citizens, but it was never intended to determine religious belief or practice.

History repeatedly demonstrates the dangers of blending religious authority with civil power. Whenever governments have enforced religious practice, the result has too often been coercion, division, and the loss of religious liberty. Many early Americans came to this country seeking freedom from state-controlled religion, and the framers intentionally prohibited religious establishments and religious tests for public office to protect that liberty.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I am especially mindful of this history. During the late nineteenth century, Sabbath observers were imprisoned under Sunday laws despite peacefully following their own convictions. Their experience reminds us that when government is given authority over religious matters, even well-intentioned majorities can unintentionally violate the rights of others.

A government empowered to favor one faith is also empowered to disadvantage another. Lasting religious liberty depends not on which group holds political influence, but on equal protection for every person's conscience. America's constitutional framework has allowed religion to flourish because faith has been advanced through conviction rather than government authority.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the historic understanding of the Establishment Clause and reject any interpretation that diminishes the separation of church and state. Protecting that boundary safeguards both religious freedom and the integrity of religion itself, ensuring liberty for all Americans regardless of their beliefs.

While I believe you are sincere in your work to provide religious freedom, I suggest you look at history and Bible prophecy to see the results that will come from implementation of your recommendations. I believe it will lead to the downfall of our nation and the countries of the world.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Douglas Schoch

Virus-free.www.avg.com

Sincerely,
Doug Schoch
Kibidula
Africa Growth and Development Initiative (AGDI)
Kibidula Farm Limited (KFL)

From: Malcolm Douglas <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Malcolm S. Douglas]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:24:53 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Religious_Liberty_Commission.pdf

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a citizen and ask that you read my attached letter.

Sincerely,

Malcolm S. Douglas
Pastor
FIRST FLINT AND CLIO
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCHES
FIRST FLINT Website
CLIO Website

Seventh-day Adventist Church
FIRST FLINT

July 10, 2026

Malcolm S. Douglas
Pastor

RE: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Via Electronic Mail to [redacted]

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:

I commend every nation that seeks to pursue righteousness, for Scripture declares that "righteousness exalts a nation" (Prov 14:34). I am also grateful for our own nation's historic commitment to the biblical principles of liberty, principles that members of my own family personally sacrificed to defend.

My father served our nation in the United States Air Force for twenty years, retiring with the rank of master sergeant. My grandfather served during the Vietnam and Korean Wars and completed twenty years of service in the United States Air Force. Other members of my family member served in WWII and as far back as the Civil War. I could mention many others, but each made sacrifices so that I, and millions of others, might enjoy the freedom to live, worship, and choose our faith according to the dictates of conscience.

Today, I serve as an ordained minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, of which I have been a member for nearly thirty years. Through personal conviction and the study of both Scripture and history, I have come to believe deeply that God invites human beings to choose whom they will serve. Joshua declared, "Choose you this day whom you will serve" (Josh 24:15). Throughout Scripture, God appeals to the human mind and conscience through reason, persuasion, patient instruction, and the work of the Holy Spirit, not through force or compulsion (Isa 1:18; 2 Cor 5:11; 2 Tim 2:24-25; 1 Pet 3:15; Zech 4:6; Philem 14; Rev 22;17).

This principle is grounded in the biblical understanding that every person is individually accountable to God and that genuine faith must arise from conviction rather than coercion (Rom 14:4; 10-12; 2 Cor 5:10). As the apostle Paul wrote, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17).

[redacted]
810.732.1690
www.firstflintsda.org

DOJ-RLC Comment-020295

Scripture also teaches that civil government has a legitimate and important role. Government is ordained to restrain wrongdoing, protect the innocent, and preserve peace and order within society (Rom 13:1-4; 1 Pet 2:13-14; 1 Tim 2:1-2). However, civil government must not claim authority over religious worship or the human conscience. Jesus distinguished between the proper spheres of civil and religious authority when He said, “Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt 22:21; cf. Luke 20:25). He further declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

Civil authority must therefore have limits. When human law directly contradicts the law of God, faithful believers throughout Scripture chose to “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29; Acts 4:18–20). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to participate in government-mandated worship, even when threatened with death (Dan 3:16–18). Daniel continued to pray according to his conscience, despite a royal decree forbidding him to do so (Dan 6:10).

For more than 150 years, Seventh-day Adventists have promoted the principles of religious liberty around the world. We have done so because we believe that the gospel advances through the truth of Scripture, the love of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit, not through the authority or influence of civil governemnt.

My deepest concern with the Draft Report is its proposed “bridge” philosophy between church and state, which suggests that religious institutions and civil government should actively strengthen and support one another. While governemnt has a solmen duty to protect the free exercise of religion and to safeguard the rights of every person of faith or no faith, it best fulfills that responsibility by reminaing institutionally distinct from religion. Religious liberty is preserved not by bringing church and state closer together, but by maintaining the proper boundaries between them.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when religious institutions seek the finluence, funding, or authority of the state, or when government assumes the role of promoting religion, both instutitions are diminished. The church loses its prophetic independence, government exceeds its proper sphere, and the liberties of religious minorities are placed at risk. The state’s responbility is not to advance religion but to protect the freedom of every person to follow the dictates of conscience without governmental favor or interference.

As a Christian, I believe that the institutional separation of church and state provides the strongest safeguard for genuine religious liberty. This conviction is reflected in the legacy of Roger Williams and in the words of many of our

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020296

nation's presidents, including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Ulysses S. Grant, John F. Kennedy, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush. The separation of church and state is not an expression of hostility toward religion. Rather, it protects the church from governmental control and preserves the state from exercising authority in matters that belong to God alone. Government should neither suppress nor sponsor religion, but should impartially protect the equal rights of believers and nonbelievers alike.

For these reasons, I am concerned that aspects of the Draft Report may move our nation away from this historic principle. The greatest danger to religious liberty is not only when government compels religious observance, but also when it becomes closely aligned with religion itself. Our nation should learn from history by preserving the healthy institutional separation that has protected both church and state for generations.

I pray that our nation will remember that the conscience is ultimately accountable to God, not to the state. Government must therefore protect the equal right of every person to believe, worship, change beliefs, or decline religious belief altogether, provided that the exercise of that freedom does not unjustly infringe upon the rights of others. This freedom is best preserved by maintaining a clear institutional separation between church and state. Without that safeguard, it becomes increasingly difficult to defend the religious liberty of those whose beliefs we reject, even though the security of our own faith depends upon the same protection. A liberty reserved only for the religious majority is not true liberty. It is merely a temporary privilege that may disappear when political power changes hands.

Christ Himself rejected the use of physical force to defend or advance His kingdom. He commanded Peter to put away his sword (Matt 26:52), and He declared that He had come not to condemn the world, but to save it (John 12:47). Scripture appeals to people to reason with God and respond voluntarily to His invitation (Isa 1:18). No person should be forced to act contrary to a sincerely held religious conviction, because violating the conscience is a serious spiritual matter (Rom 14:22–23; 1 Cor 8:12; 10:29).

Religious coercion is nothing new. The Bible records rulers who commanded worship and punished those who refused to conform (Dan 3:4–6; 6:7–9). It also warns of a prophetic power that will compel worship and enforce religious conformity through civil and economic penalties (Rev 13:15–17; 17:1–6). These passages should serve as a solemn warning to us and to our nation concerning the dangers of uniting religious authority with the coercive power of the state.

PII

Seventh-day Adventist Church
FIRST FLINT

I respectfully appeal to this Commission and to the leaders of our nation to continue protecting the freedom of every person to worship, or not to worship, according to the dictates of conscience by preserving the instituional separation of church and state that has long safeguarded our nation's religious liberty. By defending the religious liberty of all people, including those with whom we strongly disagree, we preserve the same freedom for ourselves, our children, and future generations.

May our nation continue to be a place where faith is freely chosen, conscience is respected, the separation of church and state is faithfully preserved, and government protects religious liberty without attempting to control or promote religious belief or practice is my prayer.

Sincerely,

Malcolm S. Douglas

Malcolm S. Douglas

PII

www.firstflintsda.org

From: Dawn Henderson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment: Oppose Repealing the Johnson Amendment (RLC Draft Report)
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:27:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully oppose the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I uphold the biblical principle: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21, KJV).

The Amendment protects churches from becoming political tools, preserving the separation of church and state and the purity of our prophetic witness.

Repealing it risks entangling the remnant church in partisan politics and inviting state control—contrary to historic Adventist warnings against church-state union.

Please retain the Johnson Amendment to safeguard genuine religious liberty.

Sincerely,
Dawn Henderson
Fort Collins, CO

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From: Brittany Plata <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on the Presidential Commission of Religious Liberty Draft from Brittany Plata
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:35:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

Thank you for your work, however, I am very troubled that you have said there is no separation between church and state. I live in California and I remember going to a Disneyland with my nephew and he asked about people dressed differently, I was able to explain to him that they are a different religion and that it is their choice. We were different religions in the same area experiencing the same things and enjoying our time. We were not judging each other on our religion.

I am a Seventh day Adventist Christian as you are Vice Chair Dr.Carson. We have been shown the beauty of our constitution Ellen White writes in the Great Controversy chapter 35 " "The Constitution of the United States guarantees *liberty of conscience*. Nothing is dearer or more fundamental."

In the beginning of the Declaration of Independence it states " 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"

We all do not have the same Life, some people have different religions, jobs, but we all get to choose what kind of life we get to live. We don't have the same level of liberty, some people are in debt due to their financial choices. Again that was their choice. And the pursuit of happiness, which is different for all people. For some
Money makes them happy, others land, and most I would hope it would be God. But I do not want to impose my ideology or religious ideas on other individuals.

For example when we read the 23 Psalm, some
People might take comfort in "yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me." Others might be focused on
"The Lord is my Shepherd." But that is our personal relationship with God. Where God is leading us at that time. It is our personal choice to go shallow or deep with God. Government policies will not nurture that decision, that should be made between an individual and God.

You have talked about financial support for religious, faith based non profits. As an Adventist we have ADRA, yet ever since we have taken money from the government we cannot preach the 3 angels messages and have allowed the government to take over that ministry. When the government gets involved peoples mission is taken away.

You have talked about financial support for religious education. I am a registered nurse and I have been to private and public colleges. It was nice to go to the private schools because I knew I would find others with the same faith and ideals. When I went to public colleges, I saw that there were people there who were looking for truth, some people who thought their ideas (evolution) were truth, and some people who didn't care for truth. We do not know the journey people are on and we are to plant seeds like Jesus told us to. With the guidance of His Holy Spirit. God is not a God of force or manipulation, He is a God of love. But like the movie "Book of Eli" we see religion was used as a tool to force people to do as they "interpreted" or "read" it. Jesus taught in parables so little children would understand.

We see in history the Catholic Church persecuting those who thought different and said only they could interpret the Bible. For 1,260 years the Bible was hidden from the public and people were not allowed to read it for themselves.

Texas has voted to place the 10 commandments in the schools and they cannot agree to a 7th day sabbath, so it just says keep the sabbath holy. They ignore the whole wording of the rest of the commandment explaining that God is our creator and He created in 6 days and rested on the Sabbath.

In the Bible it says "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them."
Ezekiel 20:12 KJV.

I believe Saturday is the true Sabbath, but I do not want to force someone to worship and think the way I do. Catholics and other Christian denominations worship on Sunday, Muslims worship on Friday. It is their right and freedom to choose. We all have the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, unless we have ignored His council and forced Him away.

The Politicization of Churches have become noticeable and it concerns me for the repealing of the Johnson Amendment. This protects all religious freedoms and prevents ONE religion taking over the government. Christian Nationalism has been very vocal politically and with the religious ideology. Here is a headline from The Salt Lake Tribune,

Pete Hegseth's spiritual adviser longs for a day when Latter-day Saints can't hold office or possibly even vote

This was published July 2,2026.
August 15,2025 from the Right Wing Watch they posted

Joel Webbon Says That Only Christians Should Have The Right To Vote

They wrote "Pastor Joel Webbon says in his YouTube videos that Jews, Mormons, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hindus, and atheists should not have the right to vote: "I'm a Christian nationalist, so yes, I would require a public profession of faith that you're a Christian in order to vote.""
He has even said if you are a Seventh day Adventist you should not vote. If you are a woman you cannot vote.

We are in the process of singling out one religion for special government protection who will discriminate and prosecute those who do not think like they do. Which will lead to indoctrination of Americans in the ideology of the Commission. These articles are very recent, one less than 2 weeks old, the other not even a year old. This is a current situation that if the separation of church and state be removed, there will be religious persecution.

I have not placed as much scriptures as I wanted because it is my right and freedom to express myself in the way I feel God has lead me to. It is different than the way someone else might view it, but it is my opinion and my freedom and my right. Just as I want to respect your view, your opinion, your freedom and your right. We should be respectful of each other and care for one another despite our religious differences and we are not to force people tomorrow conclusions. That is what Makes America, America.

But again if the separation of church and state is removed, there will be religious persecution and America will no longer be America.

I also agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments and I would ask you to implement them. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, Brittany Plata

From: Marlys Proctor <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION OF CHURCH AND STATE-Marlys Proctor
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:42:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

I wholeheartedly agree with PILLAR OF FREEDOM'S comments. Please implement them.

As a Christian of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church some of the recommendations and conclusions of the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Drafted Report raise several concerns. I'm in agreement that one of the foundational principles that makes America Great and sets it apart from all other nations is religious liberty.

One, being that of funding religious non-profit activities.

Another, being funding education and religious clubs on public campuses.

Also, reframing the Establishment Clause.

And repealing the Johnson Amendment.

Concluding with that there would not be complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion thus ending up like Iran, North Korea, China etc.

Thank you for your time and consideration in these matters of vital importance to the future of our nation and and its relationship to the world.

Marlys Proctor
Sunnyside, WA

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: "GRSDA Church" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: Public Comment on Draft Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 10:52:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission Members,

I respectfully submit this brief supplemental comment to my prior public comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.
In addition to the concerns already stated, I ask the Commission to make several points explicit in the final report so that religious liberty is protected not only for majority faith communities, but also for minority believers, Sabbathkeepers, and all matters of conscience.

First, the final report should state clearly that protecting religious expression is not the same as government sponsorship of religious observance. Individuals, students, workers, parents, churches, and faith-based organizations must be free to live and speak according to conscience. But civil government should not organize, promote, endorse, or pressure religious observance, even when the practice is widely accepted by the majority.

Second, the final report should expressly reject religious observance legislation. From a Seventh-day Adventist standpoint, this is especially important regarding the biblical seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, commonly called Saturday, not Sunday. Government should not directly or indirectly prefer Sunday observance, national religious rest policies, or any majority religious custom in a way that pressures seventh-day Sabbathkeepers or other minority believers to conform.

Third, the report should distinguish between voluntary private religious exercise and coercive public religious pressure. In schools, workplaces, military settings, healthcare settings, and government programs, “voluntary” religious activity can become coercive when it is organized, encouraged, or socially enforced by persons in authority. The final report should warn against both legal coercion and practical coercion.

Fourth, the report should state that public funding must never become a means of government control over doctrine, hiring, worship, curriculum, internal governance, or religious mission. Equal access principles should not be used to create dependency or entanglement between religious institutions and the state.

Fifth, the report should reaffirm that churches and houses of worship must not become instruments of partisan political power. Religious organizations should be free to address moral issues, defend conscience, and speak prophetically, but the mission of the church is weakened when religious liberty is treated as a tool of political advantage.

Finally, I ask the Commission to include a clear statement that the First Amendment protects both free exercise and non-establishment. Free Exercise protects believers from government hostility. Non-establishment protects everyone from government-backed religion. Both safeguards are necessary to preserve liberty of conscience.

As a Christian, I believe Christ invites rather than compels: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock” (Revelation 3:20, KJV). Government should follow that principle by protecting conscience, not

pressuring conformity.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlie Rice
Religious Liberty Director
Greater Randolph Seventh-day Adventist Church
San Antonio, Texas

From: [redacted] <[redacted]>
Sent: Monday, June 29, 2026 9:55 AM
To: [redacted] <[redacted]>
Cc: GRSDA Church <[redacted]>
Subject: Public Comment on Draft Religious Liberty Commission Report

Dear Religious Liberty Commission Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission.
I write as a Religious Liberty Director in a local Seventh-day Adventist congregation, and as someone who strongly supports the free exercise of religion, freedom of conscience, religious speech, parental rights, and the protection of people of faith from government hostility or discrimination.

At the same time, I am concerned that portions of the draft report appear to weaken the historic principle of church-state separation in a way that may ultimately endanger the very religious liberty the report seeks to defend.

Religious liberty is not protected only by permitting religious expression in public life. It is also protected by preventing civil government from becoming aligned with, influenced by, or used to advance the religious preferences of any majority. A government that favors religion generally, or majority Christianity specifically, may seem beneficial to many Christians in the short term, but history shows that such arrangements can become dangerous for minority believers, nonconforming Christians, Jews, Muslims, other faith communities, and nonreligious citizens.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I am especially sensitive to this issue. Seventh-day Adventists understand the biblical Sabbath to be the seventh day of the week, as defined by the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20: 8-11, commonly called Saturday, not Sunday. We observe the Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday as a matter of biblical conviction and conscience. Therefore, when I refer to Sabbathkeepers, I mean those whose faith requires seventh-day Sabbath observance, including protection from civil, workplace, educational, or social pressure to conform to Sunday observance or other majority religious customs.

Our faith tradition strongly supports liberty of conscience for all people. We believe genuine faith cannot be compelled by law, sustained by government power, or advanced through civil pressure. Religious liberty must protect the unpopular conscience as surely as it protects the popular one. This conviction is also grounded in Scripture. Christ said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock” (Revelation 3:20, KJV). He invites; He does not compel. He also declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36, KJV), showing that His cause is not advanced by civil force. When His disciples wanted to use coercive religious power, He rebuked them and said, “The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56, KJV). For that reason, government should protect conscience, not pressure religious conformity.

I respectfully urge the Commission to strengthen the final report in the following areas:

First, the final report should clearly affirm that church-state separation is not hostility toward religion. The government should not suppress religious expression, but neither should it become a partner in promoting religious observance. Free exercise and non-establishment work together. Both are necessary.

Second, recommendations involving public schools should be carefully revised to protect students from coercive pressure. Students should be free to pray, read Scripture, discuss faith, and live according to conscience. But school-sponsored religious exercises, religious displays, chaplain programs, or released-time arrangements must be handled with great care so that children and families do not experience majority-faith pressure as the price of belonging.

Third, the report should more strongly protect minority-faith concerns, including seventh-day Sabbath observance. Religious liberty must not become merely a defense of the largest or most politically influential religious groups. A strong report should explicitly protect Seventh-day Adventists, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, Indigenous religious communities, smaller Christian groups, and nonreligious conscience claims.

Fourth, I urge caution regarding public funding of religious institutions. Equal treatment is important, but government money can become government leverage. The report should clearly warn that public funding must never compromise a religious organization's doctrine, hiring, worship, mission, internal governance, or conscience.

Fifth, I urge the Commission to reconsider recommendations that would further entangle churches with partisan politics. Houses of worship should be free to speak to moral issues, defend conscience, and address injustice. But when churches become campaign instruments, religious liberty is reduced to political power. That weakens the spiritual mission of the church and endangers public trust.

Finally, I encourage the Commission to make clear that religious liberty belongs to every person, not merely to religious majorities. The test of religious liberty is not whether the government supports religion when religion is popular. The test is whether the government protects conscience when conscience is unpopular.
The draft report does not ignore the First Amendment, but it gives insufficient weight to the Establishment Clause. Free Exercise protects believers from government hostility. Non-establishment protects everyone from government-backed religion. Both are essential. By narrowing church-state separation and emphasizing cooperation between church and state, the report risks turning religious liberty from a protection of conscience into a framework for government partnership with majority religion.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Commission to revise the draft report so that it defends both free exercise and meaningful church-state separation. Religious liberty must remain a shield for conscience, not a tool for religious or political dominance.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlie Rice
Religious Liberty Director
Greater Randolph Seventh-day Adventist Church
San Antonio, Texas

From: James Chapman <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:00:13 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

[redacted]

DOJ-RLC Comment-020308

these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020309

> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020310

sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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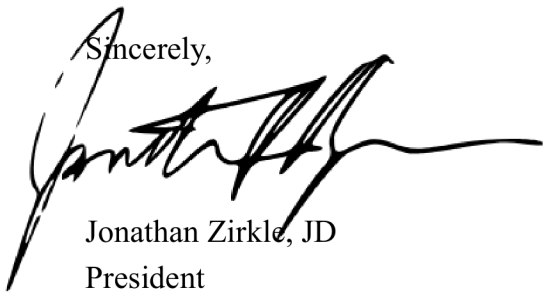
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

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DOJ-RLC Comment-020320

From: Jacob Chapman <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Jacob Chapman
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:05:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

My name is Jacob Chapman, and I live in Richmond, Kentucky. I am writing as a Christian Seventh-day Adventist and as an American citizen who deeply values religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

The Bible teaches that Christ's kingdom is not to be advanced through political power. Jesus declared, **"My kingdom is not of this world"** (John 18:36). Christ never instructed His followers to use the power of the state to advance His kingdom. Instead, He calls every person to follow Him freely, according to conscience.

Throughout history, my church has consistently defended the separation of church and state because history demonstrates the dangers of uniting religious authority with civil power. During the medieval period, when the papacy exercised both ecclesiastical and civil authority, many people suffered persecution for following their conscience. While Christians may disagree on theology, history records that the union of church and state often resulted in coercion, persecution, and the suppression of religious freedom. Those mistakes should never be repeated.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I also believe Bible prophecy warns against religious persecution. Daniel wrote of a power that **"shall speak great words against the most High… and shall wear out the saints of the most High"** (Daniel 7:25, KJV). Regardless of one's interpretation of prophecy, this passage reminds us that civil and religious authority can be misused to oppress those who faithfully follow their convictions.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve the historic principle of separation between church and state. I am concerned about proposals that would expand government funding of religious activities or weaken safeguards that have protected both religious organizations and the government from becoming dependent upon one another.

The First Amendment has helped make the United States a beacon of religious liberty by protecting every person's right to worship according to conscience—or not to worship at all. That freedom has benefited people of every faith and those of no faith. It has also allowed churches to remain faithful to God rather than dependent upon political power.

Please preserve this precious liberty. Keeping church and state separate protects both institutions and safeguards the freedom of conscience that has made our nation strong.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Jacob Chapman
Richmond, Kentucky

From: James Chapman <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:09:12 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **James Chapman** <[redacted]>
Date: Mon, Jul 13, 2026, 11:00 AM
Subject: I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
To: <[redacted]>

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission. I believe in the Constitution of The United States of America and that it guarantees freedom of religion for all Americans by keeping church and state separate. We do not want a repeat of the 1260 years of church state joined together bloody persecution that took place in Europe before we came to these shores to eliminate the combination of king and pope. Have we forgotten our history? I urge you not to build a bridge but rather to keep the separation that Jefferson and the founding fathers deliberately put in as a safeguard to keep religion from being used as a carnal weapon against those who dont go along with it. Lets not have a repeat of the 70 to 150 million people who were murdered in cold blood by that church and state bridged together.

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

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these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

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> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

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sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

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Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

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tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

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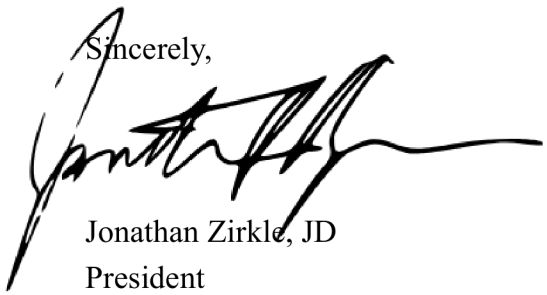
For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

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DOJ-RLC Comment-020335

From: Margarida Godinho <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] topic response eegarding the Religious Liberty Committee Recommendation
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:14:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear President Trump and Members of the Religious Liberty Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the recommendations submitted by the Religious Liberty Committee. I appreciate the time and effort that have gone into this important work and the Committee's desire to uphold the religious freedoms enjoyed by the American people.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and a grateful citizen of the United States, I write with sincere respect to express my concerns regarding the recommendations relating to the interpretation of the Establishment Clause and the proposed repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

Throughout Scripture, God has always respected the freedom of human choice. From Eden to the final invitation in Revelation, He invites rather than compels. Jesus declared, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). In these words, Christ acknowledged the proper role of civil government while affirming that matters of worship and conscience belong to God alone.

The Bible teaches that genuine faith cannot be produced through legislation or government authority. Love for God and obedience to Him must be the result of personal conviction, not civil enforcement. Liberty of conscience is therefore not only a constitutional principle but a biblical one.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we cherish religious liberty not merely because of our history, but because we believe it reflects God's character. We defend the freedom of every person to worship according to conscience—or not to worship at all—without fear of coercion or discrimination. These freedoms protect people of every faith and those of no faith alike.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when civil authority becomes closely aligned with religious authority, both religious liberty and civil liberty suffer. The wisdom of America's Founding Fathers in establishing protections for the free exercise of religion while preventing the establishment of religion by the state has preserved these precious freedoms for generations. I respectfully urge that their writings and the historical reasons behind these constitutional safeguards continue to receive the careful consideration they deserve.

I am also concerned that repealing the Johnson Amendment could unintentionally weaken the distinction between the mission of the church and the role of the state. The church is called to proclaim the everlasting gospel, to minister to people's spiritual needs, and to speak with a prophetic voice rooted in Scripture. Its influence is strongest when it remains faithful to its spiritual mission rather than becoming identified with partisan political interests.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has long affirmed that religious liberty includes both the free exercise of religion and freedom from religious coercion. These principles are foundational to the First Amendment and have enabled people of diverse beliefs to live together peacefully while freely practicing their faith.

I respectfully ask that the Department of Justice carefully consider these biblical, historical, and constitutional principles before adopting recommendations that could alter the longstanding understanding of the relationship between church and state. I would also welcome a broad public discussion that includes constitutional scholars, historians, religious liberty advocates, and representatives from diverse faith communities.

My prayer is that our nation will continue to preserve the God-given freedom of conscience that has long been one of America's greatest blessings, allowing every individual to seek and worship God according to the convictions of his or her own heart.

Thank you for your service to our country and for considering the perspectives of citizens who deeply value both religious freedom and the Constitution of the United States.

Respectfully

Maria Margarida Godinho

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From: Sudhir Pandit <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State (Sudhir Pandit, MD)
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:16:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and a retired physician. My ancestors were Hindus from India. In the providence of God the gospel of Jesus Christ was brought to us by missionaries and we converted to Christianity in recognition of its unimpeachable claims. Unfortunately, however, there is a growing spirit of animosity against minority religions in the land of my birth as Hindus seek to force Hinduism on the populace as the state religion.. The persecution of non-Hindus has been the inevitable result.
With much regret I find this deplorable mindset emerging in these United States as well, albeit from a Christian perspective. The proof lies in the draft report you have submitted. The effort to deny, downplay, obfuscate and topple the wall of separation between Church and State is a dangerous work...
My lifelong study of the Holy Bible, of over seven decades, has confirmed in my mind the complete God-given freedom of the conscience in the performance or non-performance of our duties to God. Two undeniable truths come to the fore: 1) The Ten Commandments were intentionally given on two tables of stone. The first four Commandments, defining our relationship to the Almighty God, constitutes our duty to the Godhead. This encompasses the domain of the Church. The last six Commandments define our duty to our fellowman. This is the domain of the State. The two are distinct and separate. Each must stay in its own lane. 2) The Lord Jesus bolstered the concept when He blindsided His detractors trying to entrap Him by saying, "Render unto Caesar (the State) the things which be Caesar's and unto God (the Church) the things which be God's." Luke 20:25. The dark ages, which witnessed the martyrdom of untold millions of saints, present a stark reminder of the horrendous result of mingling/combining statecraft with churchcraft.
So my counsel is to scrupulously avoid tampering with the "wall of separation" between church and state (whether real or implied) afforded us in the First Amendment to the Constitution lest we descend into another era of spiritual darkness and tyranny. The Bible supersedes all human legislation including the Constitution of the United States. Only intelligent, free will worship, unforced, uncoerced is acceptable to the God of heaven
Respectfully yours,
Sudhir K. Pandit, MD

From: S Burgess BROWSING THE BIBLE <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment before adoption of newly released draft report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:25:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a Seventh-Day Adventist, I deeply cherish the Biblical Sabbath, the sacred seventh day of the week—Saturday—which God has called us to keep holy. I also value the liberty which permits everyone—regardless of religious or political affiliation—to worship as they choose, whether or not it agrees with my own choices. I also love the United States of America and the principles upon which it was founded. The United States has been uniquely blessed by God, becoming a refuge for those fleeing other countries where their God-given freedom of choice and liberty to worship according to Scripture and freedoms were restricted by the state.

History repeatedly proves that whenever civil government involves itself in the religious practices of its people, persecution inevitably follows. Our forefathers understood these dangers well. That is why the First Amendment, in the Free Exercise clause and the No Establishment clause states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" U.S Const. Amend. 1 cl 1.

The purpose is obvious: these clauses in the First Amendment were to keep church and state separate so that the two be not mingled by a "bridge" or otherwise. Religious liberty cannot exist without the separation of church and state.

Liberty of conscience is the fundamental right of every individual to follow his or her own moral and religious beliefs without coercion, interference or punishment by the government or its society. The separation of church and state is vitally and critically important to preserve and protect every individual's freedom to think, to believe and act according to one's own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority. No own should ever be forced to act against, or be penalized for, one's sincere beliefs.

I respectfully request the Commission to:

Reconsider, retract and redraft its report;

Reconsider and reject any interpretation of the US Constitution that diminishes, dismisses or denigrates the historic separation of church and state;

Maintain proper boundaries between the state & government authority and matters of conscience to preserve liberty of conscience;

Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities;

Withdraw any recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment; and

Consider fully enforcing the Johnson Amendment, which would restrict the political activities of churches.

From: Dorothy Schumacher <dsatmhs01@yahoo.com>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:26:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I strongly believe in the separation of Church and State. Freedom of conscience is foundational to a country founded on Judeo-Christian values. The God of the Bible and the God I worship gave freedom of choice to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden because true morality and love can only be achieved when freely chosen. Every citizen in this country should be able to worship according to their own conscience. No one belief system should ever be forced, even if it is the one I believe in. Throughout history, when Church and State are comingled, the Church is compromised. Rather than “building a bridge” between Church and State, please support and maintain the separation status.

Sincerely
Dorothy Schumacher
Pacific Grove, CA

From: Wendy Parker <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Wendy Parker
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:26:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I was deeply concerned to hear the suggestion that the Commission hopes to replace the longstanding separation between church and state with a "bridge." From my perspective as a person of faith, that change would move us in the wrong direction.

The separation between church and state was never intended to weaken religion or push faith out of public life. Rather, it has served as an important safeguard, preserving the independence of the church from government influence. Building a bridge between the two risks inviting political interests, financial incentives, and government oversight into places where the church should remain accountable only to God.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when religious institutions become closely aligned with civil power, both faith and government are ultimately harmed. The church flourishes best when it is free to carry out its mission without dependence on political authority or public funding.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to preserve the separation that has long protected religious liberty. The wall is not a barrier to faith—it is a safeguard for it.

Sincerely,

Wendy Parker

Seventh-day Adventist Evangelist & Speaker

--
Wendy Parker

"Above all, love one another deeply, for love covers over a multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8

From: Melissa Reid <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Cc: Orlan Johnson <[redacted]>, Bettina Krause <[redacted]>, "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:27:43 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: SDA_CHURCH_PUBLIC_COMMENT_–_RELIGIOUS_LIBERTY_COMMISSION_DRAFT_REPORT.pdf
Inline-Images: cg4b1mylhkmrjoisimg_I6tRE9AM3JjJUH7qv4.png

Please find attached the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventist's public comment submission on the Religious Liberty Commission report.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this public policy process.

Melissa Reid
Associate Director
Public Affairs and Religious Liberty
[redacted]

North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists®

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Seventh-day Adventist® Church
NORTH AMERICAN DIVISION

PUBLIC COMMENT – RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT

Submitted via Electronic Mail [redacted]

July 13, 2026

Religious Liberty Commission
US Department of Justice
Office of the Associate Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

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

The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists submits these comments in response to recommendations put forth in the draft report of the Religious Liberty Commission.

For reference, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States comprises approximately 1.2 million church members, 5,400 congregations, and 800 schools.

For more than 170 years, the Adventist Church has promoted freedom of belief for all people everywhere. For Adventists, the principle of religious freedom has strong biblical, historical, and theological foundations.

Because of this core belief that conscience is sacred and should be free from government control, the Adventist Church has been a pioneering force in our nation's religious liberty advocacy work. The first article on this topic by an Adventist Church leader was written in 1851 by John N. Andrews. In 1906, the Church began publishing *Liberty*: *A Magazine of Religious Freedom*. At the time, *Liberty* was the only magazine on religious freedom in the Americas. Today, the magazine is the oldest continuously published journal on religious liberty.

The Adventist Church commends the Administration's prioritization of America's First Freedom and its establishment of the Religious Liberty Commission. We applaud the Commission's goal of maintaining our nation's religious freedom protections by increasing Americans' awareness of

[redacted]
www.nadadventist.org

those rights and strengthening their ability to practice their faith in ways consistent with their sincerely held beliefs.

As a denomination with members in 212 countries and territories worldwide, we recognize the incredible freedoms afforded believers here in the United States. We are profoundly grateful for the foresight of our nation's Founding Fathers in their affirmation of these God-given rights in our nation's Constitution.

The Adventist Church applauds the Commission's assertion that "people of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when they enter the workplace" and its subsequent recommendation to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to create resources to protect private-sector employees from religious discrimination (p. 21). For decades, Adventist members in this country experienced religious liberty challenges primarily due to insufficient religious accommodation protections in the secular workplace. The Supreme Court's 2023 ruling in *Groff v. DeJoy* means that our members no longer have to choose between their faith and their job.

The Adventist Church additionally appreciates the Commission's recommendation to support litigation upholding church autonomy (p. 63), as the Church is now experiencing challenges to its ability to hire individuals who share its faith and support its religious mission.

The State of Maryland is home to several Adventist administrative and educational bodies, including the Church's world and national headquarters. Unfortunately, it now faces the requirement under the Maryland Fair Employment Practices Act to hire individuals who do not align with its values or support its mission. The Maryland Supreme Court's 2023 ruling in *Doe v. Catholic Relief Services* narrowed the exemption for religious employers. Now only certain employees—those whose jobs are deemed "religious enough" by the courts—can be required to be practicing members of the faith.

The Adventist Church believes that every employee has an important role to play in advancing our mission. For that reason, with the help of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, the Adventist Church filed a complaint in federal court to ensure that all religious employers can continue to hire only those who embrace their religious beliefs and uphold their standards (*General Conference v. Horton*). That case is currently on appeal to the Fourth Circuit awaiting decision, after oral argument in March 2026.

CONCERNS

The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists appreciates the Commission's work in amplifying current challenges regarding religious freedom and the importance of preserving robust First Amendment protections.

However, we wish to share our concern regarding Recommendation 1: "Instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state" (p. 22).

As followers of Christ, Adventists believe that God, whose character is one of love, allows freedom of choice in matters of faith, and so should we. For this reason, the Adventist Church has historically supported the separation of church and state.

As a Christian denomination that holds this stance, not due to opposition to religion but precisely *because* of our commitment to honor God, we believe we are uniquely qualified to speak in support of our nation's longstanding legacy of proper church-state separation.

We believe the Commission's understanding of the relationship between church and state (Chapter 2) presents an incomplete and insufficiently nuanced account of the historical record. If adopted by the Department of Justice, this narrative would raise serious concerns about the long-term strength of our constitutional religious freedom protections.

We are recommending two revisions to the draft report related to the proper meaning and operation of the establishment clause of the First Amendment:

Recommendation 1: The final Religious Liberty Commission report should acknowledge the nuanced and diverse range of interpretations of the historic principle of church-state separation.

The Commission draft report notes that the phrase "wall of separation between church and state" appears neither in the First Amendment nor anywhere else in the Constitution" (p. 41). The report also notes that this is a metaphor that has been wielded, at times, by those who are fundamentally hostile to religious expression (pp. 41-44).

We believe, however, that church-state separation remains an indispensable constitutional principle and that its misuse is not a sufficient reason to minimize or discard it.

To understand church-state separation as a principle, we do not need to debate the significance of Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation" metaphor found in his 1802 letter to the Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut (p. 42). Instead, a plain reading of the text of the Constitution clearly shows that the Founders intended to create a constitutional regime with a meaningful separation between church and state.

This separation did not imply hostility toward religion or antagonism toward the Christian majority of the time—quite the reverse. But the Constitution is "secular" in the sense that its primary purpose is to define the various political institutions of the American Republic. It is conspicuously silent on matters of religion; it does not express a religious preference; and, it does not portray the government as having a religious character or purpose.

There are 4,543 words in the original Constitution ratified in 1788. Of those words, only 21 deal directly with religion—and these were inserted to explicitly prevent the state from expressing a religious preference. The "no religious tests" clause of Article VI of the Constitution simply says that someone's religious beliefs or practices can never be used to either qualify or disqualify them from holding "any Office or public Trust under the United States."

Three years later, with the ratification of the Bill of Rights, the religion clauses of the First Amendment made even clearer the Founders' intent to both shield religion from government interference, and—with the inclusion of the establishment clause—to preserve government neutrality between religions.

One may debate the degree of separation between church and state as a matter of constitutional law, but to suggest that this separation is not an important principle—that the Founders did not intend to create a meaningful restraint on government expressions of religious preference—is historically inaccurate.

Recommendation 2: Rather than asserting that those who champion meaningful church-state separation are always motivated by hostility toward religion, the Commission's final report should acknowledge that many sincere believers value this historic principle.

We respectfully ask the Commission to reconsider its suggestion (pp. 41–44) that proponents of church-state separation are inherently hostile toward religion, driven by forces such as Marxism, atheism, and other secular and philosophical movements that seek to minimize religious expression in American life.

In fact, the historical record shows that, throughout our nation's history, the most vocal and effective advocates for church-state separation have been deeply religious groups and individuals who have understood that religiously neutral governance is the strongest safeguard against persecution and state-enforced religious practices. Baptists, Quakers, Jews, and Seventh-day Adventists are among those who have championed church-state separation, motivated by their unwavering faith and their desire for free religious expression to flourish in America.

Today, the Adventist Church continues its more than 170-year advocacy for government neutrality on questions of faith. Adventists have a particularly poignant reason for understanding how necessary church-state separation is to religious freedom. As Protestant Christians who worship on the Seventh-day Saturday instead of Sunday, Adventist pastors, farmers, and laborers were criminally prosecuted in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under state-level Sunday rest laws. Adventist Church members paid fines and served time in prison and in chain gangs.

By choosing to build a nation that did not identify itself with one particular religion or sect, the Founders created something genuinely "new under the sun." They created a constitutional order that has allowed religious communities to worship, organize, publish, evangelize, educate, and serve without official permission or coercion. The result has been an extraordinary religious marketplace—diverse, voluntary, and vibrant—in which religious expression has thrived in a way that is unprecedented in human history.

We believe the Commission's report would be stronger and more accurate if it acknowledged the rich, centuries-long heritage of people of faith who have advocated for meaningful church-state separation as a means of protecting religious freedom for all.

CONCLUSION

The two religion clauses of our First Amendment, operating in tandem, represent the "both/and" genius of our unique religious freedom regime. They tell us that we can both enforce the establishment clause without being hostile to religion and rigorously protect religious free exercise without favoring one religion above others.

The free exercise clause means the government must give great legal deference and protection to religious belief and practice. At the same time, the establishment

clause defines boundaries between the role of government and that of private religious institutions.

We diminish the strength of either religion clause at our peril. These two clauses, working together, are why, in cities and towns across America, Jewish synagogues, Hindu temples, Islamic mosques, and churches of every kind—Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, and Adventist—can occupy real estate within hailing distance of each other.

The North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists appreciates the Administration's prioritization of religious freedom, the work of the Religious Liberty Commission, and the opportunity to submit comments on the Commission's draft report. We urge the Commission to incorporate our recommendations.

May God continue to bless our great nation and its people.

Respectfully,



G. Alexander Bryant, DMin
President
North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists



Orlan Johnson, Esq.
Director, Public Affairs and Religious Liberty
North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists

From: Thomas Mayhew <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Thomas Mayhew
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:42:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Esteemed Members of the United States Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to you regarding the recent report that you released to the public for comment. I want to begin by thanking you for your work on religious liberty matters and for taking the time to show care and concern for the religious groups in our great nation. As a Seventh-day Adventist Pastor myself, the subject of religious liberty is near and dear to my heart; for without this sacred principle, sharing the gospel would be far more difficult.

I wanted to bring up something from the report that I have some concerns about. It has to do with the report's redefining of the concept of “separation between church and state.” While the report seems to diminish this separation as too extreme or no longer applicable, I believe that this principle is fundamental to our nation. While this phrase does not appear in the Constitution, some basic study of our nation’s history reveals that our nation’s founders intended the affairs of government and religion to remain separate when they wrote the 1st Amendment.

This guiding principle of our nation has been what has made us unique over the course of our history. Millions of people have come to this great country, many in part or in whole due to the promise that this nation makes to them: that their government will not interfere in matters of religion. Nearly every time a government has begun entangling itself in religious matters in this world’s history, it began the subsequent downfall of that government and/or the stripping away of the freedom of citizens.

Separation of church and state need not affect the personal faith of officeholders. Elected officials should be free to exercise their own religion as much as the rest of this country’s citizens. My concern has nothing to do with the religiosity of this country’s administrations, whether past, present, or future. My concern, based on the 1st Amendment, is that this report begins to pave a path for this nation’s government to interact with or encourage religions of its own choosing in an official capacity.

Here are a couple present-day examples that align with this concern. Enforcing the display of a religious law (such as the 10 Commandments) or enforcing praying in public schools constitutes government overreach. The government has no right to coerce children in public schools to pray, especially if the parents of the children have a different religious affiliation. These are just a couple of several concerning examples of possible government overreach according to the new understanding of “church” and “state” set forth in the report.

As a pastor of strong Christian faith and values who is actively seeking to spread the gospel, my encouragement to you is to continue seeking to protect religious liberty, not by using government power to give religion a boost, but by protecting every citizen’s constitutional right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Thank you for your tireless, unselfish public service, and for taking the time to read my feedback.

Pastor Thomas Mayhew

From: Jay Richter <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Jay D Richter
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 11:50:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing because I genuinely did not expect to have to write this letter. Church and state must stay separate in this country, and I hope this Commission will not do anything to unsettle that wonderful arrangement. When I heard a body like this had been convened, my first reaction was disbelief that the question needed revisiting at all.

Some people today claim that strict separation of church and state is a modern invention forced onto a founding generation that never intended it. The historical record says the opposite. The Virginia struggle over establishment, Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance, Jefferson's Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, Article VI's ban on religious tests, and the ratifying conventions that demanded the First Amendment as further protection all point the same direction. And it was not skeptics who pushed hardest for separation but the churches themselves, having felt establishment pressing down on them from underneath. Madison, who drafted the 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 with it would be a most flagrant usurpation. Any commission that wants to credit the founders with favoring state-sponsored religion has to explain away Madison's own words.

Religion is a matter of the heart, and no statute can reach the heart. Government can compel attendance but it cannot compel belief, and history shows that trying to do so breeds hypocrites rather than believers. Worse, the church that accepts state help pays a steep price of its own. Madison surveyed fifteen centuries of established Christianity and found, in his words, pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both superstition, bigotry, and persecution. A faith that needs the state's help to survive has already confessed something troubling about itself.

The pattern is not new, and it never stops where its first defenders promise it will. Constantine's first Sunday law in the year 321 seemed modest, but it set in motion mercenary conversions, state partisanship in religious quarrels, and eventually the Inquisition. As one of the writers I have read puts it, if the first step is taken, the last step is then as certainly taken, because the last step is contained in the first. No one setting up a small religious accommodation today intends an Inquisition. No one ever does at the first step.

We do not need to guess at outcomes, because America has already run this experiment. Salem's judges in 1692 were sincere, devout men who believed they were serving God, and they produced a wanton violence against the plainest principles of morality. In 1892, Tennessee jailed and chain-ganged Seventh-day Adventist farmers for quietly plowing their own fields on a Sunday after already resting on their own Sabbath, while trainloads of other workmen passed the jail unbothered every week. Good intentions did not prevent injustice then, and they will not prevent it now.

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

Respectfully,
Jay D Richter
Riverdale, IA

From: Marc Nordby <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Marc Nordby
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:02:31 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was troubled to read that the Commission wants to repeal the Johnson Amendment which will further politicize America's churches, and expand funding of religious organizations engaging in religious activities. This is in essence replacing the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." and as a person of faith, I find the idea alarming. Both of these recommendations are counter to the separation of church and state as provided for by the Constitution.

I am a Seventh Day-Adventist and I have lived in the US my whole life and have had the freedom to worship as my conscience dictates. I am glad that other religions who don't agree with me are able to worship as their conscience dictates as well.
The founders of the United states were from all faith backgrounds. (They were not all Christians). Some of the ideas found in the constitution were from Roger Williams the founder of Rhode Island. He saw the persecution by the puritans and realized that freedom of religion was important and so he founded the colony of Rhode Island where people of different faiths could worship as their conscience dictates. These ideas were included in the constitution. The words "wall of separation between church and state" are not included in the constitution but the principles are absolutely contained in it. "God" is not mentioned in the constitution. If the founders were truly wanting to set up a Christian nation you can be sure they would have included the mention of God in the constitution.

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. All you have to look at is history where anytime the state has control of the church persecution occurs. Look at the Dark ages with the Catholic church and the persecution of people that didn't believe like them, as well as the Nazi Holocaust. These are just 2 examples. 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. Religious liberty is strongest when the government is strictly neutral. I urge the commission to revise its recommendations and to affirm strong free exercise of religion and to preserve the establishment clause's separation principle and the Johnson Amendment's guardrails.

Thank you for serving and being willing to accept feedback on this important issue.
Sincerely,
Marc Nordby
Athol, Idaho
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From: John-Mark Steubing <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] SUBJECT PUBLIC COMMENT – RECOMMENDATIONS 1 AND 9
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:13:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for inviting public comment on the Commission's draft report. I appreciate the Commission's attention to genuine violations of religious liberty and its desire to protect people of faith from discrimination, coercion, and unequal treatment. I support strong protection for the free exercise of religion. At the same time, I respectfully urge the Commission to revise Recommendations 1 and 9 so that efforts to protect religious exercise do not weaken the equally important safeguards against governmental establishment of religion and political control of the church.

I submit these comments in my personal capacity as a Christian, a Seventh-day Adventist, and a citizen of Georgia. As a member of a minority Sabbath-keeping faith, I do not view the separation of church and state as hostility toward Christianity. I view it as one of the protections that allows every person to worship according to conscience without government pressure, religious favoritism, or civil penalties for dissent.

Recommendation 1: Preserve both free exercise and nonestablishment.
The draft recommends that the Department of Justice issue guidance explaining the "proper understanding" of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state. Any such guidance should make clear that protecting religious expression is not the same as joining the authority of government to the mission of religion. The government should neither suppress faith nor sponsor it. It should protect voluntary religious exercise while remaining impartial among religions and between religion and nonreligion.

For Seventh-day Adventists, this concern is not merely theoretical. Our history has taught us to be cautious whenever civil authority is asked to reinforce religious observance, even when the proposal is presented in Christian language or supported by a religious majority. A government powerful enough to advance the religious practice favored today may later be used against the religious minority of tomorrow. Freedom of conscience is safest when government protects the believer's right to obey God but does not define, promote, or enforce religious duty.
Thomas Jefferson described religion as a matter between a person and God and understood the First Amendment as creating a wall of separation between church and state. James Madison likewise warned Americans to resist the first experiment upon their liberties and argued that religion must be left to individual conviction rather than force. These principles do not require the removal of religion from public life. They require that public faith remain voluntary and that civil power not become an instrument of religious control.

I therefore ask the Commission to revise Recommendation 1 so that any Department of Justice guidance expressly affirms: no official church or preferred faith; no coerced worship or religious observance; equal treatment for all faiths; full accommodation of sincere religious exercise where reasonably possible; and no governmental reward, penalty, or disability based on a person's religious profession or nonprofession.

Recommendation 9: Protect the independence of churches from partisan politics.
The draft also recommends repeal of the Johnson Amendment. I recognize the legitimate concern that religious leaders should be able to preach freely about moral issues, public policy, and the duties of

Christian citizenship. Churches must remain free to speak clearly on matters of conscience. However, there is an important difference between moral instruction and using a tax-exempt church to endorse or oppose candidates for public office.

Repeal could expose congregations to greater political pressure, allow campaign interests to seek access to pulpits and tax-deductible donations, and encourage an unhealthy exchange of political favors for religious endorsements. It could divide churches along party lines and make members wonder whether spiritual counsel is being shaped by the gospel or by campaign strategy. The church should be free to speak prophetically to every party without becoming an arm of any party. A pulpit should not become a campaign platform.

Rather than repeal the Johnson Amendment, I ask the Commission to recommend clear, viewpoint-neutral guidance distinguishing prohibited candidate intervention from protected preaching, issue advocacy, voter education, and the individual political activity of clergy and members. Fair and restrained enforcement would address concerns about chilled speech without inviting deeper entanglement between churches and partisan campaigns.

Before finalizing these recommendations, I also urge the Commission to conduct additional public review that includes historians, constitutional scholars representing more than one interpretive viewpoint, experts in nonprofit tax law, and representatives of minority faiths whose experience demonstrates why both Free Exercise and Establishment Clause protections matter.

Religious liberty is strongest when it protects the conscience of everyone: Christians, Jews, Muslims, members of other faiths, and those who profess no faith. As a Christian, I believe the gospel should advance through truth, love, service, and the work of the Holy Spirit—not through the power of the state. Please revise Recommendations 1 and 9 to preserve both the freedom of religion and the independence of religion from governmental and partisan control.
Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

John-Mark Steubing
Lafayette, Georgia

Sent via the Samsung Galaxy S23+ 5G, an AT&T 5G smartphone
Get Outlook for Android

From: Samuel Nunez <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:15:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

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 of the 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!

Samuel L. Nunez
Pastor of the Triadelphia Seventh-day Adventist Church

From: Raja Tooma <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Commission report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:19:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

- Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian.

I respect and appreciate you; the time you have put in, as well as your efforts working on this matter.

I write to you as a caring citizen.

As I read your report, I perceive a recommendation that weakens the separation of church and state; replacing the "Wall" between the two, with a "Bridge." This effectively creates a situation where the state can freely walk into the church, to do as it pleases, supporting churches with money to fund religious activities; as well as repealing the Johnson amendment.

I am alarmed by such recommendations!

What comes to mind is the very reason our country, the United States of America was established 250 years ago. Persecuted Christians in the dark ages in Europe, escaped… and found a blessing and repose in a new country: the United States of America, where a new republic was formed…where religious freedom was granted, where they could live freely…without the fear of persecution, cruelty, and the encroachments of government in religion and the church. (You may look up the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre where about 10,000 to 30,000 Christians were killed in Paris France in 1572).

The Lord forbid that even a crack in the door that separates church and state be allowed to exist. That is the only allowance we have in the constitution and the constitutional amendments to prevent such things from ever happening in our country like they did in the countries of our founders.

Dear members of the committee: having said this, I wish to add that

1. I object to government funding of 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 the church's political activities
4. And I kindly request that the Johnson amendment be fully enforced.

I thank you kindly,

With all respect,

Raja Tooma CA

[redacted]

Reply

-

From: Rebecca Collins <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Rebecca L Collins
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:20:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to express my firm opposition to any efforts aimed at weakening or abolishing the separation of church and state. As a Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist, I hold that freedom of conscience is not a privilege granted by human government, but an inalienable right given directly by God to every human being.

God's word demonstrates in Revelation 3:20 that He never forces human allegiance; He stands at the door and knocks, inviting voluntary love and obedience. When a civil government attempts to legislate religious practice or compel belief, it usurps an authority that belongs to God alone. As Jesus commanded in God's word in Mark 12:17, we must render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God. Civil laws properly govern human conduct between citizens, but they must never police a person's relationship with their Creator.

History shows that whenever civil power merges with religious authority, minority faiths inevitably suffer. As a Seventh-day Adventist who honors God's Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:8–11 to keep the seventh-day biblical Sabbath holy, I am deeply aware of how easily government mandates regarding religion, such as enforced Sunday rest laws, can infringe upon the rights of faithful believers like my brothers and sisters in Christ and myself. True religious liberty means protecting the right of all citizens to follow their conscience without fear of economic penalty, legal coercion, or state overreach.

While some today debate the scope of Thomas Jefferson's "wall of separation" metaphor in his letter to the Danbury Baptists, Jefferson's core point remains undeniable. In defining the precise boundaries of civil authority, Jefferson wrote that "the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions," affirming that religion is a matter solely between a person and their God. The constitutional separation of church and state exists to protect this boundary, ensuring that the government never oversteps its authority by attempting to govern the conscience or dictate religious practice.

To coerce the conscience is to act contrary to the character of Christ and the foundation of genuine faith. I urge the Commission to uphold the historic constitutional safeguard of religious liberty, protecting the right of every individual to freely worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience.

Respectfully,

Rebecca Collins

From: Jaden Obodum <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Jaden Obodum
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:27:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who supports both religion clauses of the First Amendment, and I ask the Commission to treat the founders' separation of church and state as what it actually was: a deliberate design, not a modern imposition. It grew out of the Virginia struggle of 1776-1786, Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance, and Jefferson's Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, and the strongest pressure for it came from churches that had felt establishment from underneath: the Presbytery of Hanover, the Baptists, the Quakers. Madison, who drafted the Amendment, told the Virginia ratifying convention plainly: "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 commission that claims the founders favored state-sponsored religion has to explain away Madison in Madison's own words.

Even setting history aside, there is no generic religion for government to adopt. The moment an agency selects a text, a translation, or an interpretation to endorse, it has favored one tradition over the rest by the force of political power, and it has done so under the name of neutrality. Even the Ten Commandments are contested ground, since Protestants and Catholics number and divide them differently and read them through different authorities. J. H. Waggoner asked the question no advocate of religious legislation has ever answered: "But there are several hundred religions professedly based on the Bible. Which shall be enforced as the true one? Whose religion shall be suppressed?" Whatever curriculum or display this Commission might recommend, someone in government will have to decide whose version counts, and at that moment the state has written itself a creed.

History shows what happens when sincere majorities get that power anyway. Salem's judges were devout and certain, and still ruined innocent lives. In 1892, while the Supreme Court was calling America a Christian nation, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers for plowing their own fields on Sunday after resting Saturday, and marched them through Paris, Tennessee, in a chain gang, while trainloads of other laborers passed the jail unbothered every week. The Boston editor who investigated, B. O. Flower, described three "conscientious, law-loving, God-fearing Christian men" set to shoveling gravel on the public road. Sincerity did not protect them, and it will not protect the next unpopular minority either.

Finally, a law favoring religion is not a gift to believers; it is a leash on them. Any such law must define the faith it favors, and that definition is only as secure as the next majority that takes office. Jones put the matter to a Senate committee without softening it: "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 endorsement today are handing a tool to whoever governs tomorrow, including those who may not share their convictions at all.

Protect free exercise for all, and keep the state out of the business of religion. The two commitments stand or fall together. As a fellow Christian I would like for you to please view my response and pray about this to God and ask Him to find out the best way to preserve religious freedom for as long as this commission exists, because I believe that asking God is the best response to this question.

Respectfully,
Jaden Obodum

Sent from my iPhone

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom opposed to church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:34:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

_____-

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Kevin and Edna Misdinne
Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:we totally opposed to the unity of church and state....we r members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church....we do not follow the dictates of man,kings or pope's,but believe all people have the free will right to choose how to worship,live and the freedom to share the gospel with anyone,wherever we go.
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,
Kevin Missinne & Edna Missinne
Olympia, Washington

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom opposed to church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:34:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

_____-

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Kevin and Edna Misdinne
Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:we totally opposed to the unity of church and state....we r members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church....we do not follow the dictates of man,kings or pope's,but believe all people have the free will right to choose how to worship,live and the freedom to share the gospel with anyone,wherever we go.
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Sincerely,
Kevin Missinne & Edna Missinne
Olympia, Washington

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] [Fwd: Religious freedom opposed to church and state]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:43:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

---------- Original Message ----------
Subject: Religious freedom opposed to church and state
From: [redacted]
Date: Mon, July 13, 2026 9:34 am
To: [redacted]

_____-

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Kevin and Edna Missinne
Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:we totally opposed to the unity of church and state....we r members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church....we do not follow the dictates of man,kings or pope's,but believe all people have the free will right to choose how to worship,live and the freedom to share the gospel with anyone,wherever we go.
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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,
Kevin Missinne & Edna Missinne
Olympia, Washington

From: Rob <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] The separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:44:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greetings, dear committee, thank you for all your hard work on forming the recent document. You folks are not novices on the subject, and your vice chair is a church member of my denomination and an acquaintance of mine, who I appreciate very much.

I do believe that the phraseology, “separation of Church and state”, has been used detrimentally, especially in the Covid timeframe to work against the rights of the people and I appreciate you pointing that out and wanting to stand for for them (especially I think of our military service men). And so I think maybe some clarification and definition of terms would help the document find more acceptance.
Many, including myself are concerned that the exclusion of the term “separation of Church and State” will lead to the exclusion of the concept which runs parallel, in my mind, with freedom of conscience for all.
You know well the establishment clause, and the words of our founders, which mitigated strongly towards this separation- especially in regard to the church having undo influence with the government (history, bears out the results of Church and State uniting in that way).
This country is “the Marvel of nations” as one author put it, and what made America great is what will make America great again and always- and that is liberty of conscience for ALL, from which sprang capitalism. Any efforts to exalt one religion above above others, or to demote any religion below others is contrary to our nations original founding, and its future success (as I am sure you will agree).
Thank you in advance for your understanding and for the common goal of continuing to work together to assure that capitalism and liberty of conscience for all continue unhindered.

Sincerely,

Pastor Rob Benardo
Sacramento Central
Seventh-day Adventist Church
God's Glory - My Greatest Joy

From: Cesar Santos <santoscj2015@gmail.com>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:49:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

It's my understanding, as a simple man of trade, that the US Constitution protects All religious minorities to express, assemble, and live by their faith based beliefs. Whenever there is a specific church denomination or religion exalted and promoted by the state, all other denominations and religions are looked upon with repudiation.
History, time and time again, notifies those who are living in this world that a union of church and state ALWAYS brings persecution, fines, imprisonment, and even death. This is not only seen during the time of the 13 US colonies but around the world.

Faithful men, women, and children who believed the Holy Scriptures and the standard of life were not always meek humble, faithful, and loving but also loyal and courageous during the most difficult times. "Professed" national Christians persecuted and killed in the name of God. That happened with the Son of God, disciples, millions of martyrs during the dark ages, etc., and it could happen again vividly in the United States of America land of freedom if there is no stop to this union.

The justification to bring such union together seems blatantly favorable to prosper this nation, even in the name of bringing families together, going to church on a specific day, rest, national prosperity can seemingly look good, and also, something that I would favor as well. But not destroy individual liberty of conscience which is more precious than rubbies and gold.

Imagine making a national law that requires all to bow down to a church altar whose image is that of a supposedly apostle or supposedly Jesus on Thursday's. If a person does not comply to that law made by church-state requirement that person will be fined and even imprisoned. No state should be forcing an individual conscious to worship the first 4 commandments. Yes, I believe we are called to worship the one who made the heavens, the earth, the seas, and the fountains of water, and the one who came to redeem us but NEVER to coerce love and worship. True love only reciprocates love not force.

Relying on a small group of people to dictate a whole nation on how we should worship, when to worship, and who to worship only demonstrates the classic example of empowerment, sandhedrin self righteous, money stewards, and moral authoritarians. It will give them the power to prosecute those whom they believe are heretics, outcasts, non-believers, and dissidents, according to their views. It's a very dangerous view for union of church and state

The establishment of liberty derives itself from the Creator himself, not a specific church nor the state. America's contribution is to give protection to every person under its jurisdiction to worship according to their own conscience. Righteousness and prosperity comes about, when rightfully protected, it gives freedom to flourish and excell without tyrannical force.

As a Bible believing Seventh day Adventist young man, I write this to please consider to absolute separate ecclesiastical and state union authority. The United States should be a place where believers are free to express their beliefs even though their might be differences. Once again, look back at historys injustice, bigotry, hatred, and persecution before going forward with the motion to unite a specific set of creeds and doctrines from a specific church stance.

Respectfully yours,

Cesar Santos from Arkansas

From: Heidi Pianelli <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation. of Church and State - Heidi Burkhardt
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 12:56:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I hope you are all well. I am writing to voice my concerns about your recent report. As you know from history, when church and state unite, persecution follows.

I am a new Seventh Day Adventist and know from my Bible (God's Word) that I am worshipping on God's day, not man's. Bible prophecy reads that the union of church and state is antichrist (against Christ.) God never forces anyone to do anything but gives everyone the freedom of choice.

You can't force anyone to believe in God, be a Christian or any other religious mandate. The heart has to change by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The first four commandments on the first tablet of stone is our relationship with our God, whichever god we as free people choose to worship. The second six commandments on the second tablet of stone is our relationship with others. These commandments everyone should be mandated to follow.

Please do not change the separation of church and state, the consequences will be disastrous. I am praying you make the right decision.

God Bless, Heidi Burhardt
California

From: Kevin Van Tassel <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Kevin Van Tassel
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:02:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as an American 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'm a person of faith, a 7th-Day Adventist, and I love that this country protects the freedom of people of all walks of life and faith and declares that it will "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." It's in the 1st Amendment of the constitution. The idea of separation of church and state is right there.

There was a very horrible period in earth's history called the dark ages. It's when countless people were murdered because they had different beliefs than the rulers of the land. Those rulers were a union of church and state. It's the inevitable outcome when church and state combine.

I get that people want morality in our country. I do, too. But you can't mandate a change of heart. You can't mandate love! Only by love is love awakened. If people want more Christians or more of whatever religion you are, you have to show others by your own life's example that it is the best way to live.

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,

Kevin Van Tassel

Sparta, TN

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

From: James Ash <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on the Religious Liberty Commission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:05:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious liberty Commission,

I'm writing to express my deep concern over the language contained in the draft report that was recently released on June 26, 2026, by the Religious Liberty Commission.

My concern is that the Religious Liberty Commission wants to tear down the wall of separation between church and state, without fully taking into account the roots of this wall. Many have falsely attributed "the wall of separation", to one letter written by Thomas Jefferson.

But a careful study of history shows that the roots of separation between religious and civil institutions goes back much earlier, to Roger Williams, and as far back the Anabaptist movement in Europe.

I feel that this report, if adopted, would build a bridge between religion and civil government, and inevitably lead to discrimination of the minority in America.

Please stand for religious liberty for all citizens of America. Please insist that the U.S. Government not become enmeshed with religious affairs or organizations.

Sincerely

James Ash

Pastor James Ash
Stateline Adventist Church
[redacted]

From: richard moller <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:06:15 -0400
Importance: Normal

Good Afternoon,
I am writing to express my concern with the plans the commission has regarding religious freedom protection. It is very clear to me the founding fathers expressed their intent to keep matters of religion separate from the civil government, and while it is being said, the constitution does not say the separation of Church and State I believe it is abundantly clear the intent is expressed as such. I am respectfully requesting we keep Church and State separate. I am a Seventh-day Adventist and keeping Church and State separate protects my right to worship or not worship according to the dictates of my conscience.

Thank you for your consideration,
Richard Moller

Sent from Gmail Mobile

From: R R <PII>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <PII>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Robert Rice
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:06:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I have been personally affected in a negative manner after privately expressing my views of religion to a certain prospective employer. Certain rights were provided me by the government, and I tried to stand up for those rights but it did not work in my favor. I am a Christian, and I hope in the Jesus of the Bible and believe the truths of that great book.

Thank you so much, members of the Religious Liberty Commission, for exploring the relationship between church and state. My religious background also highly values the free exercise of religion and the proper balance between church and state.

In regards to conceiving of religious liberty as a "bridge" between church and state, I would like to humbly provide a few facts below about why the "wall" analogy was originally used. Please consider the below facts about true prophets, false prophets, and the current and future prophetic history of the United States of America.

Before destruction of towns, townspeople, and temples, a loving God sends warnings and exhortations by his prophets. Before the flood came, God sent Noah to give the judgement warning "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5 KJV). Before the children of Israel were swept out of Egypt and the death plague fell on the firstborn of that country, God sent Moses to give the judgement warning. Before the ark of the tabernacle was captured by the Philistines, God sent Samuel to give the judgement warning. Before the first Jewish temple was destroyed, God sent Jeremiah and others to give the judgement warning. Before the second Temple was destroyed, God sent John the Baptist to announce the coming of the Messiah, and Jesus himself gave a judgement warning.

In the final days of Satan's rule on earth, and before the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the "man of sin" sitting in the "temple," God sent a movement to declare "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come" (Revelation 14:7 KJV). And, God is calling people out of spiritual Babylon so they do not receive of her plagues. Thankfully, just before Israel exited Egypt, God allowed the blood of a lamb to be applied to the doorposts of those who believed in God so that the angel of death would pass harmlessly over those homes. We all have access to the blood of Christ to be spared from the upcoming judgement. Even so, some false teachers and false prophets will take grace to an extreme "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 1:4 KJV). However, we are admonished: "We then, *as* workers together *with him*, beseech *you* also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1 KJV).

Jesus warned about some extremely convincing false prophets: "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24 KJV).

One of prophet Jeremiah's major jobs was to counter false prophets. Similarly, the New Testament attests that true prophets are given to counter false doctrines and lies: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;... That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; (Ephesians 4:11,14 KJV).

Furthermore, God says he will reveal major events before they happen: "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7 KJV).

As a safeguard against false prophets, God gave a few tests of a true prophet.

The true prophet should agree with former inspiration: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20 KJV).

Their predictions should come true: “When the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him” Jeremiah 28:9 KJV).

They will be known by their fruit: “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles” (Matthew 7:15-16 KJV).

They should confess Christ: “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God” (1 John 4:2 KJV).

True prophets lead people away from sin and preserve the church “And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved” (Hosea 12:13 KJV).

True prophets guide God’s people “You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron” (Psalm 77:20 NKJV).

True prophets will appear near the end of the age: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18 KJV).

True prophetic guidance is despised by Satan and is part of the end time church: “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 KJV) “...for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Revelation 19:10 KJV).

If there is a true prophet, we should be grateful and not hate the message “Despise not prophesyings” (1 Thessalonians 5:20 KJV).

As there is nothing more significant than the second coming of Christ, it seems as if this would be a good time for God to raise up a prophet to help guide his people! During the period around 1844, when judgement in heaven began, there was a young woman who started having visions and dreams. Her name: Ellen Harmon. Ellen Harmon married James White, and is better known as Ellen White, the most widely translated author in the history of the literature. Smithsonian Magazine named her as one of the 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time. She has many books published on Bible topics.

She uplifts the risen savior in her book: “The Desire of Ages” and in many of her other writings. Her over 100,000 pages of writing connect beautifully with scriptural themes and are interwoven with numerous Bible verses. She advocated health to keep the church strong. She also warned about end-time deception and last day events to help the church resist falsehoods.

There is a prophetic test we can apply to Ellen White right now. She predicted the coming together of church and state in the United States in her book “The Great Controversy,” and that the United States would eventually have a National Sunday Law of rest. Here are a few “signs of the times.”

February 6, 2025: The White House proclaimed a presidential action: “Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias”[1]

February 7, 2025: The White House established the “White House Faith Office” with a stated goal to remove barriers to church participation in state functions: “identify and propose means to reduce burdens on the free exercise of religion, including legislative, regulatory, and other barriers to the full and active participation of faith-based entities, community organizations, and houses of worship in government-funded or government-conducted activities and programs.”[2]

May 1, 2025: The White House Established a “Religious Liberty Commission”[3]

January 29, 2026: A Presidential Action proclaimed 2026 the “Year of Celebration and Rededication”

Date N/A: White House announces “America Prays” which “An Invitation to Prayer and Rededication of the United States as One Nation Under God”[4]

March 19, 2026: The United States Department of Labor announced a Center for Faith on it’s government website.[5]

2025/2026 The Department of Labor sends out “Happy Sunday” images with church-goers on their social media.

April 17, 2026: The White House released a news brief, “Presidential Message Commemorating 250 Years of the Bible in America.” The report says: “Together, we will honor Holy Scripture, renew our faith, usher in a historic resurgence of religion on American shores, and rededicate the United States as one Nation under God.”[6]

April, 2026: The White House Religious Liberty Commission Chairman says: "It is time to set the record straight: there is no such thing as ‘separation of church and state’ in the Constitution”[7]

April 21, 2026: The sitting President reads scripture for the “American Reads the Bible” event and quotes 2 Chronicles 7:14, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”[8] This is a common verse used by Christian Nationalist’s.

Ellen White also predicted that the United States and the Papacy would one day unite. These powers have a long history of division. America was overwhelmingly Protestant at it’s founding, some say well over 90% were Protestant. Only one Catholic signed the Declaration of Independence and 55 of the 56 signers were Protestants. The first time a Pope ever came to visit the United States of American was not until 1965. The United States did not establish an embassy to the Holy See until 1984. The first American Pope was elected in 2025, and he himself was surprised because he did not expect an American to be the Pope. When John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic US President, was elected in 1960 he had to defend his Catholic faith because so many protestants were still weary of Catholics. About a century earlier, in 1865, the first woman to ever be executed by the US Government was sentenced to death because she helped plot the death of Abraham Lincoln. The woman was Mary Surratt, a Catholic, and her behavior rekindled anti-Catholic sentiment in America.[9]

Many in America came here because they were fleeing religious persecution. The first amendment of the Constitution was designed to protect religious liberty. The Roman Catholic Church has apologized for former persecutions and killing millions during the dark ages, but that does not mean her dogmas have changed. Interestingly, there seems to be new unity between USA and the Pope despite a public disagreement between some leaders. July 3, 2026, the Pope received the 38th annual Liberty Medal from the US based National Constitution Center. These powerful world players are uniting.

God also warned, that if there was a false prophet who did perform signs that came to pass, it would be to test his people. Deuteronomy 13:1-4 reports:

> If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.

There happens to be a beast (that is, a Kingdom, Daniel 7:23) that appears on the prophetic scene at the end of the world and certainly will test his people. This beast also has the title of “false prophet.” And, it will do signs.

Before we discover the identity of the false prophet, here are the Bible verses that show the 2nd beast of Revelation 13 is the same entity as the false prophet of Revelation chapter 19. Notice the distinguishing markers

of the 2nd beast of Revelation 13: miracles and deception. This beast came out of the earth 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." (Revelation 13:14 KJV). In Revelation 19, the same beasts of Revelation 13 appear near the end of time. However the second beast is referred to as the "false prophet" while the first beast is simply referred to as the beast: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image" (Revelation 19:20 KJV). The 2nd beast of Revelation 13 and the false prophet of Revelation 19 do the same thing because it is the same entity under a different name. It does miracles and deceives people into making an image of, and taking the mark of, the 1st beast.

Who might this false prophet/beast be?

Revelation chapter 13 describes that a 2nd beast would rise up out of the earth after the 10-horned beast received a deadly wound. As we have discovered, the 10-horned beast was Rome. Rome is the same power that wanted to devour Christ at his first coming (Herod killing babies, ruling for Rome) and crucified him (Pilot, ruling for Rome) in Revelation 12. This is the same beast that had a whore (unfaithful church) sitting on it, representing the Roman Catholic church (Revelation 17). Rome is the great city (Revelation 17:18) that ruled over the kings of the earth in the dark ages. Rome is the city that sits on 7 mountains (Revelation 17:9). The Roman church riding the 10-horned beast blasphemously claims to be able to change God's law, and persecuted the saints for 1260 years, drunk with their blood (Revelation 13:5, Revelation 17:6). However, the Roman Catholic church received a deadly wound at the end of the 1260 years of her reign, from 538 in 1798, when the Pope was taken captive. The Bible explains it like this: "He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword" (Revelation 13:10 KJV). Right after this, another beast rises "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth" (Revelation 13:11 KJV).

Again, the 2nd beast came up out of the earth. Interestingly, the earth is described in Revelation 12 as the place that helped the true church when they fled persecution from the false church: "And the earth helped the woman" (Revelation 12:16 KJV). Protestants, who are considered "heretics" by Catholics, had been chased into the wilderness all around much of Europe by Catholics for a good portion of the 1260 years of Papal reign. And, nearing the end of those 1260 years, they were fleeing to a new wilderness area. The wilderness that they fled into near the end of those dark years became a place free from persecution, a new nation: The United States of America. This 2nd "beast" that rose up out of the earth near the end of the Papal Reign declared independence in 1776, and ratified it's constitution in 1788, just as the 10-horned beast, in it's Papal phase, was about to receive a deadly wound in 1798. The 2nd beast is described as such: "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" (Revelation 13:11 KJV). The two horns are like a lamb, and notice that there are no crowns on the horns. American is a nation that has a government without a king, and a church without a Pope. There is no royalty in the United States, and there was no official church or church leader when the constitution was ratified.

Furthermore, this beast gets lot of power "he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him" (Revelation 13:11 KJV). He has power to be forceful, give death decrees, and control buying and selling (Revelation 13:15-17). The United States has gained amazing worldwide military and financial power, and is able to push around other nations by using bullets or controlling cash flow. The United States spends more on defense funding than the next 9 countries combined. The US aircraft carrier fleet is as large as the rest of the world's carriers combined. They have triple the aircraft of the next competing nation. However, they also have massive financial power. Edward Fishman, who wrote the book "Chokepoints," reports: "Economic warfare has become the primary way the United States confronts international crises and counters rivals."

However, the Bible says the 2nd beast "spoke as a dragon." The dragon is the Devil, who gave the 1st beast of Revelation it's power "the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority" (Revelation 13:2 KJV).

Therefore, the prophecy is saying that the same persecution that was done by the Roman Papacy will be done in the United States.

Even at the conception of the colonies that later became the USA, there was religious persecution. In Europe at the time, church and state were still united and persecuting those deemed different (both Protestants and Catholics). The American colonies started out this way as well. A man named Roger Williams had been convicted of heresy, fled for his freedom, and then decided to make a place of rest for individuals looking for freedom to follow the convictions of their own heart. He wanted to preserve religious liberty and did so in a place called Providence, Rhode Island, where people could worship according to the dictates of conscience. This was the model for the first amendment of the US Constitution. Williams ideas were the foundation of Thomas Jefferson's phrase "wall of separation between church and state."

In the beginning, the American colonies persecuted just as they had been persecuted. Then, the Constitution provided religious freedom. However, the separation between church and state in America has been slowly eroding as prophecy proclaimed. Most do not realized that it was not until 1864, during the Civil War, that "In God We Trust" first appeared on coins. Notice is written about the constitution here:

> On November 13, 1861, in the face of shaken Union morale caused by Confederate victories in the Civil War, Reverend Mark R. Watkinson and other ministers of the First Particular Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, wrote to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase requesting "the recognition in some form of the Almighty God" on U.S. coins as a means not only to "protect" the nation from harm but to rid the nation of the reputation of heathenism. The United States, nearing the end of its bloody civil war, suffered massive loss of life, and people had been uncertain about the nation's future. Watkinson's efforts were part of a larger campaign waged by an organization of eleven Protestant groups, which sought unsuccessfully to amend the U.S. Constitution to include a reference to God.[10]

It was not until 1954 that "Under God" was added into the Pledge of Allegiance. In 1956, During the Cold War, "In God We Trust" became the official national motto. The motive for both of these additions, in part, was to distinguish the United States from the "godless" Soviet Union. In 1957 is when the government first added the new religious motto to paper money. In 2022 the supreme court got rid of the "Lemon" test for excessive entanglement between church and state and now favor a "historical" approach rather than entanglement. The problem is, history has slowly been changing the relationship between church and state during emergencies.

As you can see, the connection between church and state is growing stronger in the United States, and that these connections seem to grow quickly in times of national crisis. The White House, as previously noted, has recently demonstrated a highly favorable attitude between church and state. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative public policy think-tank who wrote "Mandate for Leadership, The Conservative Promise," (also known as Project 2025, the Presidential Transition Project[11]) actually promotes Christian rest for nation. One section intends to recommend "Sabbath Rest," by paying workers time and a half for hours worked on the Sabbath. The day they chose for the Sabbath defaults to Sunday. There is a clause for other days of worship, but it appears to be a stepping stone. This change has not materialized yet, however, the author of this exact portion of "Mandate for Leadership" was hired as the Solicitor General for the Department of Labor. And, now that the Department of Labor has a Center for Faith, it may be coming soon.

The "speaking like a dragon" (religious persecution) is soon to follow after the reconnection between church and state. The Bible says, that people who do not receive the "mark of the beast" will lose financial freedom: "no man might buy or sell," and, will eventually suffer a death decree "as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed" (Revelation 13:17 KJV, Revelation 13:15 KJV). Those who will have freedoms are those who "had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Revelation 13:17 KJV).

Please consider what the Catholic Church claims as her "mark" of authority. Regard the change of the sabbath rest day:

Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change was her act. And the act is a mark of her ecclesiastical power and authority in religious matters.

—C. F. Thomas, Chancellor of Cardinal Gibbons, in answer to a letter regarding the change of the Sabbath, November 11, 1895.

It is well to remind the Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and all other Christians, that the Bible does not support them anywhere in their observance of Sunday. Sunday is an institution of the Roman Catholic Church, and those who observe the day observe a commandment of the Catholic Church.

—Priest Brady, in an address, reported in the Elizabeth, NJ 'News' on March 18, 1903.

Protestants ... accept Sunday rather than Saturday as the day for public worship after the Catholic Church made the change... But the Protestant mind does not seem to realize that ... in observing Sunday, they are accepting the authority of the spokesman for the Church, the pope.

—Our Sunday Visitor, February 5th, 1950.

The [Roman Catholic] Church changed the observance of the Sabbath to Sunday by right of the divine, infallible authority given to her by her founder, Jesus Christ. The Protestant claiming the Bible to be the only guide of faith, has no warrant for observing Sunday. In this matter the Seventh-day Adventist is the only consistent Protestant.

—The Catholic Universe Bulletin, August 14, 1942, p. 4.

Deny the authority of the Church and you have no adequate or reasonable explanation or justification for the substitution of Sunday for Saturday in the Third - Protestant Fourth - Commandment of God... The Church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact.'

—Catholic Record, September 1, 1923.

Perhaps the boldest thing, the most revolutionary change the Church ever did, happened in the first century. The holy day, the Sabbath, was changed from Saturday to Sunday. "The Day of the Lord" (dies Dominica) was chosen, not from any directions noted in the Scriptures, but from the Church's sense of its own power. The day of resurrection, the day of Pentecost, fifty days later, came on the first day of the week. So this would be the new Sabbath. People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority, should logically become 7th Day Adventists, and keep Saturday holy.

—Sentinel, Pastor's page, Saint Catherine Catholic Church, Algonac, Michigan, May 21, 1995

The Sabbath was Saturday, not Sunday. The Church altered the observance of the Sabbath to the observance of Sunday. Protestants must be rather puzzled by the keeping of Sunday when God distinctly said, 'Keep holy the Sabbath Day.' The word Sunday does not come anywhere in the Bible, so, without knowing it they are obeying the authority of the Catholic Church.

—Canon Cafferata, The Catechism Explained, p. 89.

Question: Which is the Sabbath day?
Answer: Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Question: Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?
Answer: We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.

—Rev. Peter Geiermann C.SS.R., The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, p. 50

In contrast, there is another group of people at the end of time that are sealed in their foreheads with the seal of the living God (Revelation 7:3-4). It is true that when we trust in Christ we are sealed by the spirit "In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13 KJV). However, one major function of the Spirit is to guide into truth: "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13 KJV). Notice the truth sandwich here: "after ye heard the word of truth," "...ye were sealed with that holy Spirit" who has the function to "guide you into all truth." God's people will have his spirit and his truth.

A vital end time truth is that the 4th Commandment of the decalogue is also the "seal" of God and a "sign" that helps mark his true people. Political seals often have a name, title, and territory. The 4th Commandment declares the name of the "LORD thy God," his title is the creator (the LORD made), and his territory is "heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Exodus 20:10-11 KJV).

We are commanded to "remember" the Sabbath day. Another word for remember is to "mark" something...such as "mark my words." When we remember the Sabbath to keep it holy, we will be, in a sense, marked by God in our foreheads with his delight: "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD..." (Isaiah 58:13-14 KJV). And, the promise given is: "and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father…."

God also calls the Sabbath a "sign" between him and his people: "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I *am* the LORD that sanctify them" (Ezekiel 20:12 KJV), and "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations" (Exodus 31:13 KJV).

The Roman Catholic church claims to have the authority of the apostles. And yet it was Peter, whom the office of the Papacy claims to be the direct successor of, who claimed we should follow God rather than man: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29 KJV).

What brings the final curse and the end of the world? We are told it happens because man breaks and/or changes God's law.

> Behold, the LORD maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof... The earth mourneth *and* fadeth away, the world languisheth *and* fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, **changed the ordinance**, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left (Isaiah 24:1, 4-6 KJV).

When the 2nd beast of Revelation 13 (false prophet/United States) makes an "image" to the 1st beast (Rome), there will be a connection between church and state again. The "mark" of the beast will be Sunday rest. Just as the 1st beast (Rome) forced worship, so will the 2nd beast: "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" (Revelation 13:12). This will happen as Rome regains power, as it has, and the United States encourages others to follow their example "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" (Revelation 13:14 KJV).

There exists a solemn curse for those who think to change and break God's laws. The most holy place contained the true commandments of God, not to be tampered with, written in stone.

If the wall of church and state separation is changed to a bridge, it will be a bridge to worse things rather than better things. Please consider these things as you decide how to proceed. Blessings.

1 https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/eradicating-anti-christian-bias/

2 https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/establishment-of-the-white-house-faith-office/

3 https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/establishment-of-the-religious-liberty-commission/

4 https://www.whitehouse.gov/freedom250/america-prays/

5 https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/osec/osec20260319

6 https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2026/04/presidential-message-commemorating-250-years-of-the-bible-in-america/

7 https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/religious-liberty-commission-holds-final-hearing-past-present-and-future-religious-liberty

8 https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-bible-reading-marathon-christian-evangelicals-307cba34a42e73ed2222ca36305c2637

9 https://adst.org/2015/09/establishing-relations-with-the-holy-see/

10 https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/god-we-trust

11 https://static.heritage.org/project2025/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf

From: Clinton Meharry <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Objections to government sponsored education and church activities
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:11:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

When a government begins sponsoring education, they will eventually decide what can and cannot be taught in school. They will tend to lean toward the most popular opinions and church groups. However, in relationship to spiritual matters, the majority has often been in the wrong. The majority persecuted the prophets in the Old Testament and called for Jesus to be crucified. Even after the powerful evidence of His resurrection, the majority did not believe and began to persecute the followers of Jesus.

Jesus said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Matthew 22:21.

Governments are responsible for keeping human evil in check to protect society from those seeking to kill, steal, lie, and physically and/or sexually abuse others. When this happens, even if it is in the "name" of religion, the state must act to protect people. See Romans 13.

When government begins to step over the line and regulate the first four commandments, it is taking the place of God and will begin controlling what people can say and do and how they can worship. When this happens, there will be no worship, for it doesn't come from a motive of love and appreciation for God.

For example, the most common "rest day" in Christianity is Sunday. However, nowhere in the Bible does God say He made Sunday holy. The Roman Catholic Church has proudly accepted responsibility in "trying" to change God's holy day to Sunday. I said trying, because God has not changed the day, nor given permission to change it. Even the Roman Catholic church acknowledged this in the council of Trent.

While the wording of "separation of church and state" is not in the constitution or the Bill of rights, the value of the concept is vital. We don't want the state to interfere with religion or religion trying to tell the governments how people should worship in this country. And if government begins to sponsor one religion over others, religious liberty will end and much chaos in the country will be the result.

Clinton Meharry

--
Pastor,
La Grange, KY Seventh-day Adventist Church
Pewee Valley, KY Seventh-day Adventist Church
Shelbyville, KY Seventh-day Adventist Church

[redacted]

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https://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=e85ecb88-8d12a2da-e859ef6d-74fe4867716e-c32b709d998cd0d9&q=1&e=e51880af-408e-400a-a791-cf2a68f4dc59&u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.compellinglove.org%2F (The Compelling Love of God Bible Studies)
https://protect2.fireeye.com/v1/url?k=3a34e0ad-5f7889ff-3a33c448-74fe4867716e-bfcaecf8ae013a32&q=1&e=e51880af-408e-400a-a791-cf2a68f4dc59&u=https%3A%2F%2Fpeweevalleyky.adventistchurch.org%2F
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From: Debbie Roper <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Religious Liberty (Johnson Amendment) Debbie Roper
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:15:31 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, a citizen of the United States of America, and do not agree with repealing the Johnson Amendment Act. I believe it is very much a part of the Constitution; in that it is the first amendment of the Constitution, and should remain as such. The Separation of church and state should also remain separated, because of the first amendment of the Constitution.

First Amendment

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,

Concerned Citizen

Debbie Roper

From: Northwest Present Truth Association <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment: Opposition to Recommendations in the Draft Report on Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:26:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Commission,

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

While I strongly support the Commission's emphasis on religious liberty—particularly regarding the protection of freedom of conscience and shielding individuals from coercion and persecution by civil governments, employers, and fellow citizens—I am deeply concerned about the potential for the establishment or favoring of certain religions that may arise from specific recommendations.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, my denomination has a long history of advocating for religious freedom for all faiths. This principle of liberty of conscience is deeply rooted in our understanding of God's love, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and God's final judgment against injustice.

True religious liberty is inhibited, rather than guaranteed, when the state intertwines itself with religion. Therefore, I must express serious concerns regarding the following recommendations in the draft report:

1. Financial support for religious, faith-based non-profits.
2. Financial support for religious education.
3. The politicization of churches and religious non-profits by repealing the Johnson Amendment.
4. Singling out one religion for special government protection.
5. The indoctrination of Americans in the ideology of the Commission.

Instead of protecting liberty, these measures risk establishing government favoritism and undermining the essential separation of church and state necessary to ensure true freedom for all believers. I urge the Commission to revise these recommendations to ensure that religious freedom is preserved equally for everyone, without state entanglement.

Sincerely,

Jon Beaty
Estacada, Oregon

From: Kendall Johnson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:30:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a citizen of america I have had the privilege of worshipping on the day I choose, I am a Seventh day Adventist and I believe that the Bible tells us to worship on Saturday the Sabbath of God, this would affect me and my religion if we were not allowed to worship on the Sabbath, on behalf of all Adventists we do not agree with a day being forced on anyone because Jesus wants us to have freedom of choice and he wants us to follow him out of love not out of fear, I understand the desire for the government in wanting to make a day of rest but we were built on freedom, if we force people to worship on a specific day that will only push people farther from the truth.
Sent from my iPhone

From: Shannon Armantrout <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:33:41 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

As a Christian Seventh Day Adventist, my conviction and firm belief is that preserving separation of church and state is vital for every human being. No one should be dictated when, how or to whom they are to worship in any capacity. It is a human right to choose! It will set us back centuries! This is why the puritans left Europe in order to freely practice their faith apart from persecution and fear.

Please do not allow changes to our human and constitutional right to freedom of religion and from religion! Thank you for your time a service to our country!

Sincerely,

Shannon Armantrout
Portland, Tennessee

From: Jacquelyn Van Sant <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Jacquelyn Van Sant
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:34:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a proud US citizen and resident of Arizona who believes deeply in both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses, and I write with a specific worry in mind. Government enforcement of one religious ideology over all others has been tried repeatedly across history, and it has failed every time, even when the men behind it believed themselves moral and good. Theocracy, however well-intentioned at its founding, slides swiftly toward tyranny, persecution, and death. Separation of church and state is not hostility to faith; it is the mechanism that protects every religion, and the right to hold none, from being seized as a weapon by whichever faction currently holds power.

The idea that strict separation is some modern invention grafted onto an indifferent Constitution does not survive contact with the historical record. The churches themselves, the Presbytery of Hanover, the Baptists, the Quakers, pushed for separation because they had felt establishment pressing down on them from underneath. 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 most flagrant usurpation. Any commission that wishes to claim the founders for state-sponsored religion must first explain away Madison in Madison's own words.

This is not only a matter of founding-era intent; it is a matter of settled American precedent, decided by the government itself. When Sabbatarian petitioners asked Congress to legislate Sunday observance, the 1829 and 1830 congressional reports answered that it is not in the legitimate province of the legislature to determine what religion is true or what false, because our government is a civil and not a religious institution. Those same reports warned that once a legislature defines one point of religious duty, it may with equal propriety proceed to define every part of divine revelation. That warning came from Congress itself, a generation after the founding, while men who had lived through it still sat in that body.

History also shows what happens once the machinery of religious enforcement is built, regardless of the sincerity of its builders. The judges of Salem thought they were doing God service, yet they stand condemned for the horrific violence they did to the plainest principles of morality. The blood of innocent women and men have stained their legacy. And in 1892, decades after the founding was supposedly secure, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers and marched them through the streets of Paris, Tennessee, for quietly plowing their own fields on a day the majority held as sacred, according to their own personal beliefs. Good intentions did not prevent persecution then, and they will not prevent it now.

Finally, coercion cannot produce the thing religion actually requires: a willing heart. Forcing people to attend church, refrain from labor on a specific day, read the Bible in public school classrooms, and fear voicing any dissenting opinion online without swift retribution from local authorities will not make Christians of them. It may make hypocrites of many, but Christians of none. Madison's own survey of fifteen centuries of established Christianity found pride and indolence in the clergy and superstition and persecution among the people. Even General Grant counseled that we should leave religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school, and keep the state and church forever separate. State favor has never strengthened a faith; it has hollowed it out.

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

Respectfully,
Jacquelyn Van Sant
Arizona

From: Debra Millet <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church & State - Debra Millet
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:35:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Committee Members:

⚠️ AMERICA IS PLAYING WITH FIRE.

I oppose the U.S. government's assault on Religious Liberty.
Please Protect Religious Freedom.
Defend the Constitution. Preserve the separation of church and state—before we discover too late why America's founders considered it so essential.

For nearly 250 years, the separation of church and state has served America extraordinarily well. It has protected Christians, Jews, Muslims, other faiths, and those of no faith from government coercion while allowing religion to flourish freely.

Jefferson and Madison understood what history had already taught: when government gains power over religion —or religion gains power over government—freedom of conscience is endangered.

History's warnings are unmistakable.

Europe suffered centuries of religious persecution, executions, and bloody warfare as governments enforced religious conformity.

Even in colonial America, Puritan governments persecuted religious dissenters. Roger Williams was banished for advocating religious liberty. Quakers were imprisoned, whipped, banished, and even executed because their beliefs conflicted with government-established religion.

And Black people have not escaped this danger. Rastafari believers, a religious movement born among Black Jamaicans, have endured government persecution, arrests, suppression of their religious practices, and even the forcible cutting of their sacred dreadlocks.

America's founders learned from the bloody history of government-controlled religion and chose a better way.

For nearly two and a half centuries, the separation of church and state has protected both religion and democracy. Why would we now destroy a constitutional principle that has served America so remarkably well?

It's sad and disappointing that Dr. Ben Carson, a so-called prominent Seventh-day Adventist, is a vice chair on the presidential commission on religious liberty, even though his Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically been one of America's strongest defenders of religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

Whenever government acquires the power to promote religion, it also acquires the power to regulate religion, favor one faith over another, and eventually punish those whose beliefs fall outside the religious majority. This is precisely why Adventists have defended religious liberty for generations.

Christ did not force belief. God does not compel the conscience. Neither should the government.

Church-state separation is not hostility toward Christianity. It protects Christianity—and everyone else—from government control and religious coercion.

Again, Committee Members, America is playing with fire!🔥 🔥 History has already shown us where this road can lead.

Please Protect religious freedom.
Defend the Constitution. Preserve the separation of church and state—before we discover too late why America's founders considered it so essential.

Debra L. Millet
Huntsville, Alabama

From: Linda Tipton <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comments - Separation of church and state by Allan and Linda Tipton
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:47:09 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

In this country's history was an argument against such an attempt to combine church and state. In December 1888, Alonzo T. Jones presented his argument against the unifying of church and state. Mr. Jones' argument emphasized the importance of religious liberty by the separation of church and state. Mr. Jones also argued that civil government should never legislate regarding religious observances and that there are distinct areas of life governed by religion and civil authority that should not overlap. Mr. Jones emphasized that the government could regulate relationships among individuals but must respect the jurisdiction of religion over personal faith and practices.

Alonzo T. Jones' stance on religious liberty was shaped by his opposition of said 1888 Blair Sunday law bills in the U.S. Senate, which sought to impose Sunday as a national day of rest and require public schools to teach Christian principles, leading him to testify before Congress. His advocacy also reflected the Seventh-day Adventist Church's early commitment to promoting religious freedom as a universal human right.
Mr. Jones' significant arguments arose during the 1888 proposal of a national Sunday law. He contended that such a law would be unconstitutional. His main points included:
• Violation of Individual Rights: he believed that enforcing a specific day of worship infringed upon personal freedoms.
• Theological Overreach: He viewed the law as an attempt by certain religious groups to impose their beliefs on others, which he opposed vehemently.

We know that God foretold in His Word that this country [identified as the beast that comes up out of the earth in Revelation 13] will take it upon herself to unite church and state.

We know that this will lead to the further legislating of promoting of a specific day of "rest" (worship) as that proposed Sunday law in 1888 which was then ruled as unconstitutional and a violation of individual rights.

God tells us that this country will legislate against His authority established AT CREATION in the 4th commandment as a PERPETUAL MEMORIAL. The Sabbath, the Lord's day, mentioned in the 4th commandment is the 7th day, Friday sunset through Saturday sunset. [Sunday has always been the first day of the week.]

For our final statement, we bring to your attention a portion of Mr. Jones' argument before the senate to keep in mind when the government of this free nation enacts Sunday Law Legislation:
Mr. Jones.-“Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.”CAR 38.9
Voice.-Is that the seventh day or the first day?CAR 38.10
Mr. Jones.-"The commandment says the seventh day, but in the face of this plain declaration of the Lord that the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, the Senate has put its own interpretation upon that commandment, and has declared that the statement that “the seventh day is the Sabbath” means “the first day of the week, commonly called Sunday.” Thus the Congress of the United States has taken the fourth commandment from the Bible and put it into its legislation, and has put its own interpretation upon that statute. If Congress can interpret the Bible

in one point, it can interpret it on every other point. So that when it went beyond the Constitution of this country in this thing, it has put itself and the government in line with all the Church-and-State governments that have ever been, and has assumed to itself to be the interpreter of the Bible for all the people in the land, and for all who come into the land. That is what has been done".CAR 38.11

It was this argument before the Senate by Mr. Alonzo T. Jones in December 1888 that gave this country's citizens continued freedom of conscience to this day.

We would like to state that first and foremost we stand grounded on the Word of God, then the Constitution and history as the basis for our convictions. Therefore, our position is against our government's unification of church and state.

Respectfully,

Allan and Linda Tipton

From: Simone Buttler <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Simone Buttler
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:47:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I respectfully submit this public comment in strong opposition to any recommendation that weakens the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state or promotes Christian Nationalism.

As a Christian, I believe that authentic faith can never be produced by political power. Faith is meaningful only when it is freely chosen. Throughout history, whenever governments have aligned themselves with a particular religion or claimed to advance God's purposes through civil authority, the result has been division, discrimination, and the loss of religious liberty for those who believe differently.

The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and freedom from government establishment of religion. These protections have allowed people of every faith—and those of no faith—to live together in peace while practicing their convictions according to conscience. Weakening these constitutional safeguards threatens the religious freedom of all Americans.

Jesus Himself rejected political coercion as a means of advancing His kingdom. He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Christ invited people to follow Him through love, truth, compassion, and persuasion—not through the power of the state. His example demonstrates that genuine Christianity flourishes through voluntary faith, never through government endorsement or compulsion.

Christian Nationalism confuses devotion to Christ with loyalty to political power. When the government favors one religion, it inevitably marginalizes others and undermines the equal dignity and rights of every citizen. Such favoritism also harms the church itself by substituting political influence for spiritual witness.

History repeatedly demonstrates that when church and state unite, religious minorities suffer, freedom of conscience is weakened, and governments begin deciding which beliefs deserve official approval. No government should possess that authority. Religious liberty belongs equally to every person, regardless of faith tradition.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I cherish the historic Protestant conviction that every individual must be free to worship God according to conscience. We ask only that the government remain neutral in matters of religion, protecting the rights of all without favoring or disadvantaging any faith. This principle safeguards believers and nonbelievers alike and strengthens both religious freedom and our constitutional republic.

I respectfully urge the Commission to affirm the enduring constitutional principles embodied in the First Amendment and to reject any recommendation that promotes government endorsement of religion or blurs the vital distinction between church and state. The United States is strongest when it protects liberty of conscience for everyone, allowing faith to flourish through freedom rather than coercion.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Simone Buttler

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment to Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:48:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone
Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:
I am a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian & believe in the separation of church & state provided by the Constitution.
Please don't build a "bridge."
I request that the Johnson Amendment not be repealed.
I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's comments. Please implement them.

Respectfully,
Susan Dunker
Weiser, Idaho

From: Christy Inskip <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Christy Inskip
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:55:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I'm writing as a U.S. citizen and Seventh-day Adventist Christian to respectfully urge you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state. For example, I urge you please do not repeal the Johnson Amendment and allow churches and religious organizations to endorse or oppose political candidates and allow government money to be used to fund religious activities. The result will be the erosion of the freedom of conscience.

Politics only divides God's people and leads them to corruption and idolatry. Christians are warned in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together..." God's people are not to make any idols. The Old Testament is full of examples of how idolatry always comes from yoking with the world or governments. God's people are to lay up their treasures in heaven and remember that the kingdom of God is not of this world. As Jesus stated in John 18:36, "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." Jesus reminded His people in Matthew 6:19-21, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

I ran for state legislator in a state I previously lived in, and committed never to run again. The system is corrupt and built so that legislators have to get endorsements and donations from specific organizations to win elections. They are then beholden to those entities and must answer to them. If various religious organizations or church denominations are allowed to donate, which denomination and their specific brand of doctrine do they listen to and legislate?

I've worked as a public servant in government my entire nearly 25-year career and have depended on state and federal funding to do my job, and I know that when someone receives funding they are then subject to their funder's values and beholden to their funder's priorities. If religious organizations are allowed to receive government funds, that invites the government into the churches, and the churches will then be beholden to the government's political priorities and whims. When churches take government money or step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing, which is not Christ-like, for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God. That's bad for both the church and the country.

Look at history and other countries, when you have a church-state, it always leads to persecution for those who act according to their conscience if it doesn't align with the ruling church. Who determines which is the ruling church? Recall the Dark Ages and the rule of the Catholic Church, which controlled rulers and burned martyrs at the stake and worse for standing on the Bible and the Bible alone because it went against their tradition and strive for money and power.

I have personally experienced religious discrimination by the state department for which I work. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects U.S. citizens from religious discrimination and being fired for their religion. My previous supervisor asked if I was available to work and table at an event on a specific Saturday. I stated that I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and because I observe the seventh-day sabbath of the fourth commandment, I was not available to work on Saturdays, Friday sundown to Saturday sundown, but would work any other day and time. Even though what I was being asked to do was a rare and not essential part of my job, HR would not accept this and pressured me to quit. So far, they have not attempted to fire me because,

thankfully, my new supervisor has not required me to work on a Saturday. However, I had to work with my church to get one of our church's lawyers to help me through this process and keep them on standby because I choose to obey God rather than man, according to my conscience. If church and state separation is eroded, I could be fired for my religion because it is not the accepted religion or Christian denomination.

My ancestors, including the Daweses, came to this country, to Pennsylvania, to escape religious persecution in England in the 1600s. As I stated, a church-state union always leads to persecution.

Separation of church and state isn't a secular idea. Our country's founders, people of faith, built separation in to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong in America, and the reason why America has stayed strong as a nation. If religions or denominations want to influence society and morality, they must do it from the pulpit and through ministry. That was Christ's way; He never forced but drew people with cords of love. I pray for the Holy Spirit to guide each of you and to help you keep your eyes on Jesus and His direction and not the world and political ambitions in this important decision. I urge you please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both church and state free.

Sincerely,
Christy Inskip
Hartsburg, MO

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 13:56:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

President Ronald Reagan once said “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government, and I'm here to help.”

Another famous quote attributed to numerous sources is “A government big enough to give you everything you want is a government big enough to take everything that you have.”

And Hillsdale College, with whom I am sure you are all familiar, boasts that it does not take even a penny of government funding because it knows that would give the government ultimate power in dictating their compliance with governmental control over them.

I have read your Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission. I see that the commission consists of predominantly Judeo-Christian members promoting Judeo-Christian beliefs. I am a life-long Christian brought up by a Quaker father, Southern Baptist mother, and married to a Seventh-day Adventist wife. Even these three Christian denominations can’t agree on theology. And remember that the early Christian settlers to America were escaping religious persecution by other Christians. So who determines Orthodoxy? Would your action allow bad actors to create their own religion or their own church in order to fraudulently qualify for government funding?

I see no mention in your report about the freedom of believers in Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, Baha’i, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, or even Satanism. What happens when these people want their tenets of faith posted in the halls of schools, public spaces, or government buildings? Would public monies be evenly distributed to their causes? Would Christians want public monies to fund non-Christian religions? What holy days would be set aside as national holidays? What prayers would be allowed before Congress, or at Presidential Inaugurations, or school assemblies? Would the “majority” rule? Would Jews or Adventists be required to worship on Sunday? Would Baptists, Catholics, etc. be required to worship on the Sabbath? The list of differences in days and methods of worship, even among Judeo-Christians, goes on and on.

You seek to “build a bridge” between church and state. A man’s castle was more secure if he had a “drawbridge” over a moat that separated him from the forces that would invade his privacy. I would suggest that the telephone, internet, and U.S. postal service are adequate means of communicating between government and religions. Once the government gets its proverbial “camel’s nose” under the tent of religion there is no limit to the damage it can do, and no good way to get it out again.

Please go away and leave the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights (i.e. Freedom of Religion) untouched.

Cordially,
Lawrence A. Morris

From: Sharon Blumenberg <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State –
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:00:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a Christian and a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe religious liberty is one of America's greatest blessings. The separation of church and state has protected people of every faith—and those of no faith—from government interference in matters of conscience.

I respectfully urge the Commission to reject recommendations that would weaken this separation, including expanding government funding for religious activities or repealing the Johnson Amendment. Churches should answer to God, not to political parties or government funding.

History has shown that when church and state become closely intertwined, both religious freedom and the integrity of the church are at risk. Please preserve the constitutional protections that have allowed faith to flourish freely in our nation.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sincerely,

Sharon Blumenberg
Tennessee

Sharon Blumenberg
Sent from my iPhone

From: Desiree Magnant <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Concern for Proposal of Separation of Church and State by the Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:02:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing to respectfully express my deep concern regarding the Commission's proposed rejection or weakening of the principle commonly known as the separation of church and state.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I strongly believe in the importance of religious faith in the lives of individuals and communities. I also believe just as strongly that every man and woman must remain free to worship or not worship, according to the dictates of individual conscience, without government pressure or interference.

America's founders understood the dangers that arise when religious authority and civil power become intertwined. Many who came to this land were deeply familiar with the history of European nations in which church and state worked together, often resulting in coercion, discrimination and persecution. The protections contained in the First Amendment were not designed to remove faith from public life. They were established to protect faith and conscience from government control.

The separation of church and state does not require religious people to remain silent, hide their convictions, or withdraw from civic life. People of faith should be free to speak, serve, vote, advocate, and live according to their beliefs. At the same time, the government must not establish, favor or enforce religious belief. This boundary protects the Christian, the Jew, the Muslim, the member of another faith and the person who professes no faith at all.

Religious liberty cannot be secure when it depends upon which religious group currently holds political influence. A government empowered to advance one group's beliefs today may use that same power to restrict those beliefs tomorrow. History repeatedly demonstrates that when civil authority is permitted to direct matters of worship and conscience, religious persecution eventually follows. There truly is "nothing new under the sun."

God does not compel worship, and neither shall our government.

I therefore respectfully request the Commission reconsider any recommendation that would diminish the separation between church and state. Please preserve a clear constitutional boundary that allows religious expression to flourish while preventing government from establishing, preferring or enforcing religion.

True religious liberty is not just the freedom of the majority to practice its faith. It is the freedom of every person to follow conscience without fear of civil penalty, exclusion or persecution. The strongest protection for Christianity is a government that protects the free exercise of faith while refusing to control it.

Please uphold this vital safeguard and preserve religious liberty for Americans of every faith and conscience.

Respectfully,

Desiree

Desiree Magnant
✉ PII

From: Chris Adams <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Objection
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:03:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Friend,

The foundational intent of the First Amendment is to preserve a functional separation between religious institutions and civil authority, a principle our Seventh-day Adventist pioneers defended with unwavering conviction. Leaders like A.T. Jones, E.J. Waggoner, and Ellen G. White taught that any union of church and state violates the very nature of God's government, which respects the free will of every individual. They argued that when the state attempts to legislate religious observance or endorse specific doctrines, it usurps the authority that belongs to God alone and inevitably leads to the coercion of conscience.

Historically, these pioneers stood as a bulwark against movements seeking to amend the Constitution to declare the United States a "Christian nation." A.T. Jones famously testified before Congress that such measures were not merely political errors but spiritual dangers that would transform the republic into an instrument of religious persecution. Ellen G. White reinforced this stance, warning that even a slight union of church and state "brings the church nearer to the world" rather than elevating the nation, ultimately corrupting the purity of the gospel and compromising the church's prophetic witness.

This commitment to separation was not simply a political preference but a prophetic necessity rooted in our understanding of biblical prophecy. The pioneers identified the enforcement of religious laws by the civil power as the fulfillment of the "image of the beast" described in Revelation, where the state enforces the decrees of apostate religion. Consequently, defending the "wall of separation" was viewed as a divine mandate to protect the church from persecution and to delay the final crisis of human history, ensuring that faith remains a voluntary response to God's love rather than a legal obligation.

Today, as we witness increasing efforts to blur the lines between sacred and secular authority, we must echo the urgent appeals of our pioneers to maintain this vital distinction. We cannot afford to trade the principle of religious liberty for the temporary advantage of state endorsement, for history and prophecy alike warn that such a path leads to spiritual bondage and, ultimately, judgment and destruction. Let us therefore stand firm in the conviction that the government must remain neutral in matters of faith, protecting the rights of all citizens to worship—or not to worship—according to the dictates of their own conscience, free from civil interference.

Best regards,

Christina Adams

From: Deon Kerr <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Defense of the Johnson Amendment and the Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:04:38 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to any effort to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. As a citizen and as a Seventh day Adventist, I believe deeply in the importance of maintaining a clear and uncompromised separation between church and state. This principle has protected both religious liberty and democratic integrity for generations. It ensures that houses of worship remain places of conscience, not instruments of political power.

Repealing the Johnson Amendment would invite a dangerous erosion of this wall of separation. It would open the door for political actors to use religious institutions as vehicles for partisan influence. It would also place faith communities at risk of becoming entangled in political pressure, financial manipulation, and divisive campaigning. The result would not strengthen religious freedom. It would undermine it.

The United States has long upheld the idea that religious conviction should guide personal conscience, not be weaponized for political gain. Preserving the Johnson Amendment protects that ideal. It keeps the pulpit free from political coercion and keeps the government from entangling itself with religious authority.

I urge the Department of Justice to defend the Johnson Amendment and uphold the longstanding constitutional tradition that keeps church and state separate. This safeguard is essential for the health of our democracy and the integrity of our faith communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely, Deon

From: "Heidi Tompkins & Ivan Raj" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report, Issued June 2026
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:06:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13, 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 (Hereinafter “RLC”) Draft Report, Issued June 2026

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

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist Christianand business owner. As such I love, value, and keep the Biblical Sabbath, which God Commands is to be kept holy on the 7th day of the week, Saturday, which God instituted and sanctified at Creation (Genesis 2:1-3), which was commanded in the Ten Commandments as the 4th commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), which Jesus kept throughout His life (Luke 4:16), and which His closest friends and disciples kept at the time of His death and resurrection (Luke 23:54-56; Luke 24:1-2).

Unfortunately, the majority of the Christian world does not keep the Biblical Sabbath holy.
Sadly, it is only a minority of the Christian world that remembers the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as is commanded in Exodus 20:8-11.

If church or religious activity is mingled with the state, state action or government authority, by a “bridge” or otherwise, it will inevitably lead to the preference of one religion over another. We have seen this time and again throughout history. This is what led people to find a new country, land, which became the United States of America, a land of Freedom, "The Land of The Free and The Home of The Brave".

I disagree with the statement of Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who chairs President Donald Trump's Religious Liberty Commission, who stated in April 2026 that the separation of church and state is the "biggest lie that's been told in America since our founding", as well as similar remarks made by Former Florida Congresswoman Katherine Harris in 2006.

The words "Separation of Church and State" do not have to exist for the principle not to be conveyed in different words, and the thoughts about a "Separation of Church and State" do not need to conclude that America's lawmakers cannot or should not have their own personal faith.
The words that DO **convey a "Separation of Church and State"** are found in the First Amendment of our United States Bill of Rights and Constitution, and are **in regards to LAWMAKING,** which is a function of the State:

"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."

James Madison wrote the amendments as a solution to limit government power and protect individual liberties through the Constitution. For example, the Founders saw the ability to speak and worship freely as a natural right protected by the First Amendment. Congress is prohibited from making laws establishing religion or abridging freedom of speech.

However, IF that conveyed invisible wall of separation between the legislative branch and the Church is broken down, persecution in our freedom loving America will undoubtedly be the result, just as it was in the life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - It was a united Church and State that Crucified Him; and as it was in the dark ages - it was a united Church and State that persecuted Christians, all the way through Rome's History, and it was THIS, that caused many to flee and seek a new land.

Please understand that the separation or wall is not meant to be between people or faith's, but between the Legislative branch and the Religious Freedoms of the people/citizens of this land and Country - this is why our first amendment was written!

I thereby plead with you to revise your thoughts and statements and use ALL of your thoughts and energies towards preserving and protecting our freedom of conscience in regards to the freedoms granted, particularly the freedom of religion.

Please consider that while the majority worship the sun and Sunday with no Biblical instruction to do so, they should have the FREEDOm to do so if desired, just as those who wish to worship on The Sabbath, the Seventh day, Saturday, just as Charlie Kirk chose to do, along with many other Sabbathkeepers around the world! May not one have preference over the other!
I hope you'll watch this video to hear Charlie Kirk's final message about The Seventh-day Sabbath: https://share.google/HkSrUXpGRYQsNAYlD

Please uphold a separation of Church and State Legislation throughout our branches of government, including the Judicial Branch that generations going forward may worship at the dictates of God and their own Liberty of Conscience and The Ten Commandments, as long as they bring no harm to others!

Sincerely,
H. Tompkins

From: Michelle Buck <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Concerns
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:15:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13, 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:

Dear Sirs or Madams,
I am writing as a committed Seventh-day Adventist Christian to respectfully express my serious concern regarding the conclusion reportedly reached by the Religious Liberty Commission associated with the administration of President Donald J. Trump during its meeting in Washington, D.C., on April 13. The commission's reported position—that there is no genuine or absolute separation between church and state—is one with which I respectfully disagree.

My conviction is founded upon the teachings of Scripture, the principles embodied in the United States Constitution, and the lessons of history. Each of these points to the same conclusion: liberty of conscience can only flourish when the responsibilities of civil government remain distinct from the authority that belongs to God alone.

Civil government has the legitimate responsibility to preserve public order, administer justice, protect the rights of its citizens, collect taxes, and govern civil affairs.

God alone possesses authority over matters of worship, faith, and conscience. The relationship between the individual and the Creator is sacred and cannot rightly be controlled by any earthly government.
Because conscience belongs to God, no civil authority has the moral right to compel religious belief, prescribe forms of worship, or interfere with an individual's relationship with God. This understanding became the foundation of religious liberty and later influenced the principle of separating church and state as a safeguard against religious coercion.

Whenever government assumes authority over matters of faith, it exceeds its proper limits. Genuine faith cannot be produced by law or force. The gospel appeals to the heart through conviction and love, never through compulsion.

Religious conviction must always be the result of free choice. No person, institution, or government possesses rightful authority over another person's conscience. When the state begins to promote, enforce, or favor religion, it crosses a boundary established by God, weakens the integrity of religion itself, and often produces conflict rather than genuine faith.

History repeatedly illustrates these dangers. Across Europe, the union of church and state resulted in centuries of religious persecution and the denial of freedom of conscience. The misuse of civil authority in support of religion

fostered oppression and eventually contributed to widespread social upheaval, including the anti-religious reaction of the French Revolution.
Many of the early settlers who came to America—including the Pilgrims and other religious refugees—left Europe precisely because they desired freedom from state-controlled religion. Their experiences helped shape a nation founded on the principle that religious faith must remain free from government control. This ideal ultimately found expression in America's founding documents. The Declaration of Independence affirms that all people "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights," recognizing that our fundamental liberties originate with God rather than with government.

For this reason, I believe that preserving a clear distinction between the authority of church and state is not hostility toward religion; rather, it is one of the strongest protections both for religious freedom and for the integrity of faith itself.

When government respects the limits of its authority and allows every individual to worship according to conscience, both religion and civil society are strengthened.
Thank you for considering my perspective. I offer these thoughts in the hope that our nation's longstanding commitment to religious liberty and freedom of conscience will continue to be preserved for all people, regardless of their faith or beliefs.

Respectfully,

Michelle Buck

From: Shelley Evans <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>, "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:16:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

I want to start off by saying that I am a simple, God fearing, patriotic American. I believe in what our founding fathers started over 250 years ago. These United States of America, were founded on the principles of religious freedom. I believe that if we were all to trace our family ancestors back to the very beginning, we would more likely than not, find that they were being persecuted for their faith. I believe that everyone has the inalienable right to believe and practice their religious beliefs as their ancestors did. I already feel that, as we have grown as a country, so has our government. I feel that our current government has a problem of knowing when they need to stand down. I have agreed with a very large portion of what our current administration has accomplished thus far. I don't want President Trump's accomplishments to be tarnished by this wrong choice and putting in the category of "this is what is best for the people ".

The United States of America was founded on religious freedom. The separation of church and state. Myself, I am a Seventh Day Adventist. I attended my church services on Saturday, which is the Sabbath. The seventh day of the week. The is already enough problems in our world today, that are government caused. I am writing this comment to you today because I firmly believe that we, as a country, need to have the separation of church and state. I know that things are coming to fruition that were written in the Bible all those decades ago. I know that there will be things happening that we as humans, will have no control over. So, that is why I feel so strongly about this...the absolute separation of church and state. I pray everyday that our government officials are protected by The Lord above. I pray that they are not being led down the wrong path. I also pray that The Lord comes soon. I also remind myself daily in my prayers, that His will be done, not mine. I also pray that we learn from our history instead of repeating it.

Bottom line, I don't want my kids and grandkids to grow up in a country where they don't have a freedom of religion. I feel that would be a very dark cloud over this great nation of ours. I pray that the Light remains bright over our country.

Thank you,
Shelley M Evans

Sent from my Galaxy

From: "D. Kevin Burk" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State Opinion and Plea to be heard...
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:21:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

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 (Hereinafter "RLC") Draft Report, Issued June 2026

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

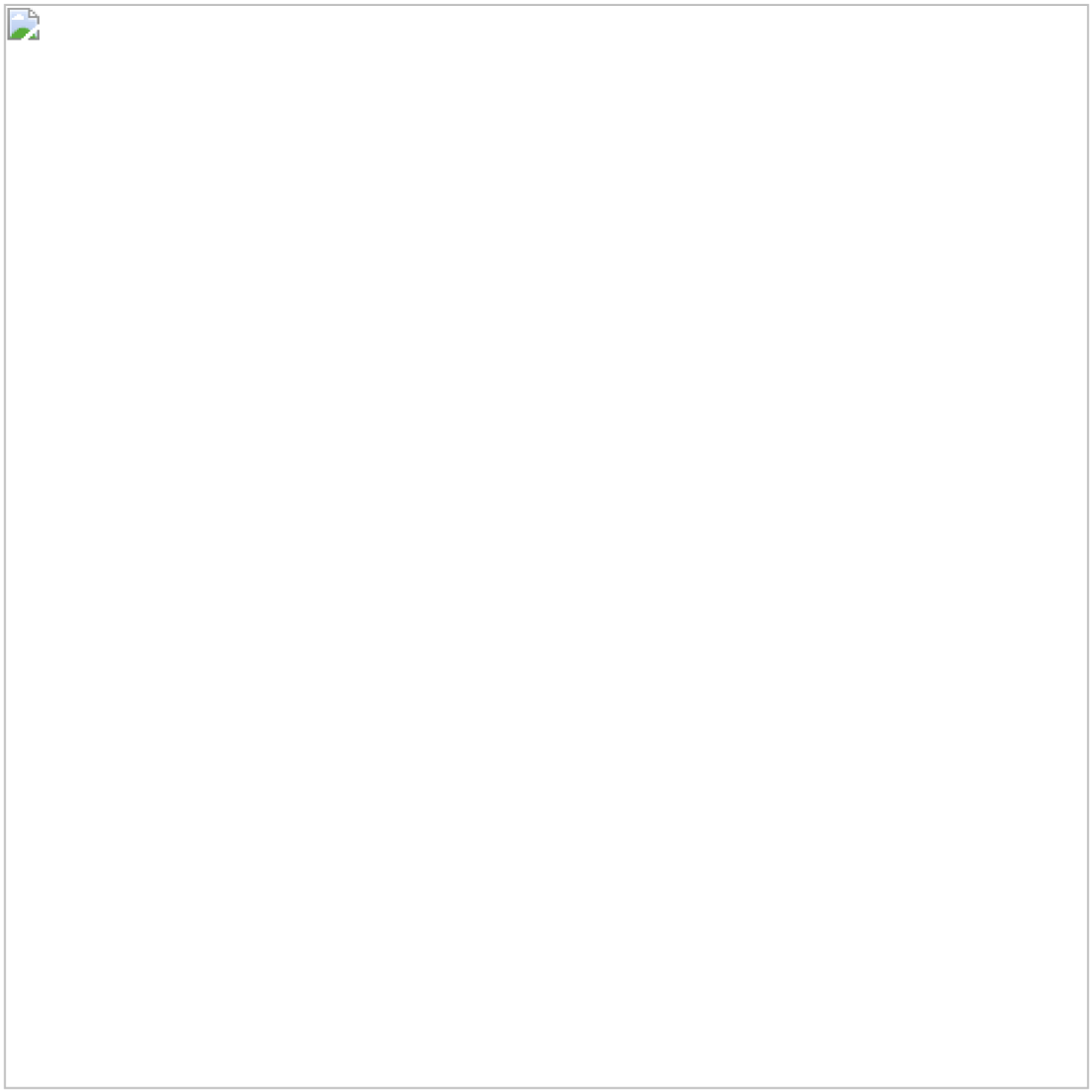
I am a full time Seventh-Day Adventist Pastor and a devoted, proud American. I will begin to share using my friend's words in this letter as they are how I would want to say what I believe. "As such I love, value, and keep the Biblical Sabbath, which is to be kept holy on the 7th day of the week, Saturday, which God instituted and sanctified at creation (Genesis 2:1-3), which was commanded in the Ten Commandments as the 4th commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), which Jesus kept throughout His life (Luke 4:16), and which His closest friends and disciples kept at the time of His death and resurrection (Luke 23:54-56; Luke 24:1-2).

Unfortunately, the majority of the Christian world does not keep the Biblical Sabbath holy. Sadly, it is only a minority of the Christian world that remembers the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as is commanded in Exodus 20:8-11.

If church or religious activity is mingled with the state, state action or government authority, by a "bridge" or otherwise, it will inevitably lead to the preference of one religion over another. We have seen this time and again throughout history, as beautifully described by the comments submitted by Heritage and Hope Ministry (https://heritageandhope.org/) and Pillar of Freedom (https://pillaroffreedom.org/)

I agree with their comments and responses to the RLC's Report and I hereby incorporate both herein by reference. Their respective comments can be found here:

1. Heritage and Hope Ministry:



1. Pillar of Freedom: https://drive.google.com/file/d/13wd1AsF3m6STwD-v0ywpXFYnI-VRv8TF/view?usp=drive_link

I object to the Religious Liberty Commission Report's dismissal and denigration of the metaphor of the "wall of separation between church and state." The wall of separation between church and state DOES exist in our U.S. Constitution. Although those particular words are not used, the concept of the wall of separation of church and state is memorialized and established in the First Amendment by the Free Exercise Clause and the

Establishment Clause, as follows: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." U.S. Const. amend. I, cl. 1.

The purpose of these two clauses set forth in the First Amendment is to maintain the separation of church and state so that the two are not mingled by a "bridge" or otherwise. Religious freedom and liberty of conscience cannot exist without this separation of church and state. Liberty of conscience is the fundamental right of an individual to follow their own moral and religious beliefs without coercion, interference, or punishment from the government or society. The separation of church and state is vitally and critically important to preserve and protect every individual person's freedom to think, believe, and act according to one's own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority. It is vital to protect every individual from coercion, in order that no one is forced to act against their conscience, nor penalized for their sincere beliefs.

The preservation of the separation between church and state is vital to avoid state or government's preference of one religion over another, in order that all people can enjoy the freedom to think, believe, and act according to one's own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Commission to:

1. Reconsider, retract and redraft its report;

2. Reconsider and reject any interpretation of the U.S. Constitution that diminishes, dismisses or denigrates the historic separation of church and state, and maintain proper boundaries between the state and government authority and matters of conscience, to preserve liberty of conscience;

3. Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities;

4. Withdraw any recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment, and

5. Consider fully enforcing the Johnson Amendment, which would restrict the political activities of churches.

Thank you for considering my thoughts, objections and recommendations on this matter."

With kind regards,

Don Kevin Burk

From: Cheryl Isaac <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:31:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

It breaks my heart to see how history is being rewritten in regards to our historical stance on the separation of church and state. Most people who came to our country in the beginning were escaping persecution because they didn't align with what their country of origin was enforcing as a state religion.

History teaches us that ANY time church and state align there is persecution of the worst kind. Religious liberty is gone when individuals cannot worship (or not worship) according to the dictates of their conscience.

Even in the early days of the formation of our country, there was persecution of individuals who didn't line up with what the church / government was enforcing. Roger Williams observed this and was persecuted for speaking out against it. As you know he eventually founded the state of Rhode Island. William Penn, who was a Quaker, also saw the results of church state government and began a sanctuary for religious minorities. Therefore the idea of separation of church and state wasn't new when the founding fathers wrote the constitution. This has been pointed out by teachers of the United States.

As a Seventh Day Adventist Christian I have enjoyed the freedom of worshiping on the biblical Sabbath Day for most of my life. This is a choice I have made based on what the bible tells me. If there is a union between church and state, this liberty will be taken away from me and others who don't believe the same as the ones who become the decision makers for what day of worship/rest is valid.

I ask that you reconsider the committee's recommendation to build a bridge between church and state. History proves over and over again that whenever church and state arw together disaster follows.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Isaac
Concho, Arizona

From: Rob Durkin <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report – Robert Durkin
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:37:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
United States Department of Justice

Re: Public Comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

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

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Commission's report and on the future of religious liberty in the United States.

I write as a Christian, a Seventh-day Adventist, and an American who regards liberty of conscience as one of the most precious gifts entrusted to this nation. Religious liberty is not merely a political preference or a privilege granted by government. It arises from the dignity God has given every human being and from the principle that faith, to be genuine, must be freely chosen.

At its best, the American experiment recognizes that government has neither the authority nor the competence to direct the religious convictions of its citizens. The constitutional protection of the free exercise of religion, together with the prohibition against governmental establishment of religion, created a public order in which faith could flourish without state control. These principles are not enemies. They are mutually reinforcing safeguards of the same fundamental freedom.

The Free Exercise Clause protects individuals and religious communities from government interference in the practice of their faith. The Establishment Clause protects those same individuals and communities from government-imposed religion, official religious favoritism, and coercive alliances between church and state. Religious liberty is secure only when both principles are honored.

I therefore urge the Commission to affirm clearly that liberty of conscience belongs equally to every person - not only to Christians, not only to members of the majority faith, and not only to those whose beliefs are politically influential. It must protect Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, members of smaller religious communities, and those who profess no religious faith. A government that possesses the power to privilege one faith also possesses the power to restrict another. History repeatedly demonstrates that powers first used against unpopular minorities can eventually be turned against anyone.

Religious liberty must also mean more than the freedom to worship privately. It includes the freedom to live according to one's convictions, to speak about one's faith, to assemble with others, to educate one's children, to observe sacred time, and to refrain from conduct one sincerely believes to be wrong. Government should make reasonable accommodations for religious conviction whenever doing so does not deprive others of their fundamental rights or impose substantial harm upon them.

At the same time, claims of religious liberty should not become instruments for gaining political dominance, imposing sectarian doctrine through civil law, or denying other citizens equal protection. Religious liberty is a shield protecting conscience, not a sword by which one religious group may control another.

This distinction is especially important in the present political climate. Many Christians understandably desire a society shaped by moral principles. Yet Christianity is weakened, not strengthened, when it depends upon governmental power. The teachings of Christ advance through truth, love, persuasion, service, and personal example - not through legal compulsion. Jesus distinguished between the things that belong to Caesar and the things that belong to God. His kingdom does not depend upon the coercive methods employed by earthly governments.

When the church seeks the power of the state to enforce religious belief or observance, it compromises both the character of the gospel and the freedom of the individual. Government may restrain conduct that causes demonstrable harm to others, but it must not attempt to manufacture faith, enforce worship, or compel religious conformity. Conscience belongs to God and the individual; it is not the property of the state.

The American record in this area is inspiring but not unblemished. Our nation has sometimes failed to live according to its own principles. Slavery, the treatment of Native Americans, religious discrimination, racial injustice, the internment of Japanese Americans, and other abuses demonstrate how easily liberty can be denied when fear, prejudice, or political expediency overwhelms principle. A mature defense of American religious liberty should acknowledge these failures - not to diminish the nation, but to remind us that constitutional words must continually be translated into equal justice.

I encourage the Commission's final report to emphasize several enduring principles:

First, liberty of conscience is an inherent human right and not a favor dispensed by government.

Second, the Free Exercise and Establishment Clauses should be treated as complementary protections rather than competing constitutional values.

Third, religious freedom must be extended impartially to people of every faith and to those of no faith.

Fourth, government should provide meaningful accommodations for sincere religious practice while carefully considering the rights and safety of others.

Fifth, the civil government should neither establish an official religion nor use its authority to promote, compel, or enforce religious doctrine or observance.

Sixth, religious organizations must remain free to proclaim their beliefs, govern their internal religious affairs, select their leaders, and pursue their missions without improper governmental intrusion.

Seventh, public officials should resist both hostility toward religion and the politicization of religion. Government must not exclude religious voices from public life, but neither should it confer favored political status upon a particular religious tradition.

Finally, the report should recognize that religious liberty can survive only where citizens are willing to defend it for those with whom they strongly disagree. The real test of our commitment is not whether we protect beliefs we share, but whether we protect the conscience of the person whose beliefs we reject.

We can preserve religious liberty only by refusing the spirit of coercion wherever it appears - whether it comes from government, religious institutions, political movements, cultural majorities, or secular authorities.

I respectfully ask the Commission to recommend policies that protect robust religious exercise while preserving the separation of church and state that makes such exercise possible. America should remain a nation in which truth may be proclaimed vigorously, faith may be practiced openly, disagreement may occur peacefully, and no person is compelled to worship - or forbidden to worship - against the dictates of conscience.

May we treasure the gift of liberty, defend it for all people, and pass it undiminished to those who come after us.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Durkin
Michigan

DOJ-RLC Comment-020412

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Commission findings
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:38:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

My name is Brent Chrishon. And I am deeply concerned about the erosion in the important and foundation principle of a separation between church and state occurring in our country. This historic understanding is now being reinterpreted under the name and in the name of religious liberty. When government has a hand in religion, especially and even with the Christian religion, historically, it leads to persecution of minority groups who may differ in matters of conscience and their own beliefs. Also as far a Christianity is concerned often state sponsored religion has a tendency to persecute those who in God's sight may well be truer to the tenants of His faith and religion then those who would eventually use state power to correct them and force them. One thing the founders knew well is that humans err. And the fact that they may wish to promote good things and even Christianity does not change this simple fact. In addition to erring, which is to say we ar prone to make mistakes, humans often have biases and personal prejudices under the surface… so the government, which must be directed by humans, being involvement in matters of religion, our founders understood well that this *in all cases* will not produce the good outcome which the persons pushing do this often think that it will (and many I am sure care not about the best good for all or even the country as a whole, but may well secretly feel that if they secure the best good, so they think, for their sect, it is the highest goal to reach for).
Please do not break down this wall of separation between church and state. It is there for a historical, Christian, religious and common-sense, well thought out and informed by historical evidences reason.

In the following, I will share further reasons of those with whom I have a like mindset concerning these things:

As a Seventh-Day Adventist, I deeply cherish the Biblical Sabbath, the sacred seventh day of the week—Saturday—which God has called us to keep holy. I also love the United States of America and the principles upon which it was founded. The United States has been uniquely blessed by God, becoming a refuge for those fleeing other countries where their God-given freedom of choice and liberty to worship according to Scripture and freedoms were restricted by the state.

History repeatedly proves that whenever civil government involves itself in the religious practices of its people, persecution inevitably follows.
Our forefathers understood these dangers well. That is why the First Amendment, in the Free Exercise clause and the No Establishment clause states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" U.S Const. Amend. 1 cl 1.

The purpose is obvious: these clauses in the First Amendment were to keep church and state separate so that the two be not mingled by a "bridge" or otherwise. Religious liberty cannot exist without the separation of church and state.

Liberty of conscience is the fundamental right of every individual to follow his or her own moral and religious beliefs without coercion, interference or punishment by the government or its society. The separation of church and state is vitally and critically important to preserve and protect every individual's freedom to think, to believe and act according to one's own inner convictions, even if those beliefs differ from the majority or state authority. No own should ever be forced to act against, or be penalized for, one's sincere beliefs.

I respectfully request the Commission to:

Reconsider, retract and redraft its report;

Reconsider and reject any interpretation of the US Constitution that diminishes, dismisses or denigrates the historic separation of church and state;

Maintain proper boundaries between the state & government authority and matters of conscience to preserve liberty of conscience;

Withdraw any recommendation that would fund religious activities;

Withdraw any recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment; and

Consider fully enforcing the Johnson Amendment, which would restrict the political activities of churches.

Thank you,

Brent Oliver Chrishon

From: michelle anderson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:47:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.

As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "*Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's.*" Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.

Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.

Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter.

Sincerely,

Michelle Anderson

Charlotte, Michigan

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: Meryl Proctor <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Concern with Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty - Meryl Proctor
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:47:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

As a Seventh Day Adventist Christian, I am grateful for the religious liberty that America has provided me. I appreciate efforts to protect those freedoms. However, I am especially concerned about two items in the report:

1. Reframing the Establishment Clause.
2. Repealing the Johnson Amendment.

On page 22 of the report, you recommend changing the wall of separation of church and state into a “bridge” between church and state. And on page 121, you articulate repealing the Johnson Amendment.

I was deeply troubled by how governments around the world including America responded to the COVID crisis. I was alarmed by the suspension of individual rights to exercise their freedom of conscience. I appreciate the report’s attempts to restore those rights. However, removing safeguards makes we, the people, more vulnerable to unchecked power.

Throughout history, when the church and state unite, it has inevitably led to coercion of conscience and ultimately to religious persecution. This coercion is precisely what happened during COVID. Removing this firewall of protection leaves us even more defenseless. Even if the current administration wields the power responsibly and fairly, what might a change of administration with a “religion” of secularism do?

Looking at U.S. history, the separation of church and state was championed by people of faith to protect religious freedom, not to advance secularism. Religious liberty is strongest when government remains neutral—neither hostile to religion nor entangled with it.

I urge the Commission to revise its recommendations to protect robust religious freedom for all Americans while preserving the Establishment Clause's separation principle and the Johnson Amendment's safeguards.

Sincerely,

Meryl Proctor

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: Don Russell <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - separation of church and state - Donald E. Russell
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:48:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Honorable Members of the Religious Liberty Commision;

The history of this great nation, the United States of America, is now at a turning point. Our founders, in the wisdom given them by our Creator, have instituted safeguards to our freedoms and liberties. We have been set apart from the nations of the world by one of these liberties in particular. That freedom, that liberty, is the right of each citizen to follow their individual conscience in the matter of religious practice and choice. This singular freedom, the liberty to worship without interference from government, is God-given and cannot be regulated, abolished, or bound by any human institution. Our forefathers understood, from the history of the Church-State power which ruled this earth during the period of time which historians call the Dark Ages, that in order to guarantee the citizens of this great country the liberty of religion, the Church and the State must, at all costs, be maintained separated. Now, after 250 years of exemplifying Courage, Excellence, Wisdom and Liberty to all in our nation, and to all the world, this current administration is on the verge of repudiating portions of that great document, the Constitution of the United States of America, which has guided us in our unprecedented success.

I will grant you that the exact words, “separation of church and state”, are not found in the constitution, just as the word “millennium” is not found in the Authorized version of the Holy Bible: albeit, the concept is expressed in so plain a manner as to be comprehended by all who are holding the truth of the document to heart, and not seeking to forward a particular popular interpretation. I therefore object to the thrust of your report, of ‘building a bridge’ between the state and the church, and caution the reader, that once the wall of separation is torn down, all manner of evil now manifested by the state (corruption, funding of the murder of unborn human beings, hostility against other countries [read individuals] not of the same ideology, to name a few examples) will be adopted by the church as the floodgates of monetary assistance open. I believe that what the Commission Members intend for good for all citizens by their report, will, in the end, be found to be the facilitating document of untold evil perpetrated on the minority by the majority.

As to religious freedom and liberty to speak our conscience, I find it pitiable that your commission censored and disbarred one of your own members, Carrie Prejean Boller, for voicing her first amendment protected right to free speech, and foresee this act, as history repeats itself, on a grander scale, once a ‘bridge’ is erected where our Founders prefigured none should be.

I am privileged to be a fifth generation Seventh-Day Adventist. This denomination has spoken clearly regarding keeping separate church and state affairs. The history of the 1888 Blair Bill, which was contested successfully in front of Congress by Alonso Trevor Jones, one of our members, serves well to illustrate our denomination’s position on the freedom that God has set forth for His people. An excellent treatise on this affair can be found in The National Sunday Law book by A. T. Jones, for those who wish to fully understand the current matter at hand.

I pray our Creator God, the One who inspired the following verse, bless you, guide and direct you as the days we are now living, just before the imminent coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven, are indeed solemn , momentous, and full of import:
“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land.“ 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Sincerely and most Respectfully Yours,
Donald E. Russell

Sent from my mother’s iPhone

From: Ginger Anklin <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:48:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **Ginger Anklin** <[redacted]>
Date: Mon, Jul 13, 2026, 2:46 PM
Subject: Separation of Church and State
To: <[redacted]>

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I believe to build a bridge between the separation of church and state will take away Religious freedoms. Our forefathers fought for our freedoms and the US needs to maintain this separation.
I am a Seventh day Adventist and the right to worship freely is important to me.
Please uphold the separation of church and state, that's why it is in the US Constitution!
Thank you for reading my letter!
Sincerely,
Ginger Anklin

From: Loretta Kravig <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:49:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

First of all, thank you for allowing us to weigh in on this matter. I appreciate the time and effort put forth to discuss this matter dealing with the personal practice of religion in the United States.
As a Seventh-day Adventist, I have concerns about the first and ninth recommendations, and the seeming disregard of the founding fathers' interest in establishing and maintaining religious freedom for the citizens of this country. Even though the exact words "separation of church and state" are not found, the principles of that phrase are evident in many places from people like James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. (I was privileged to be in Washington DC recently and visited the Jefferson memorial. The words of Mr. Jefferson recorded on the walls are very much in favor of personal and religious rights.)The framers of the constitution were largely Christian themselves (or Deist) and wanted the freedom to worship God according to their various beliefs without the interference of the State. People like James Penn, Obadiah Holmes, and Roger Williams were persecuted for being religious "dissenters" as they tried to peacefully carry out their religious beliefs. These brave souls were an inspiration and counsel to the men who were shaping our nation.

And, in carrying out some of these recommendations, you will undermine other aspects of our Constitution, in relation to freedom of speech and press. This country was founded on the principle of freedom. Please don't take it away!

Sincerely,
Lorrie Kravig

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - separation of church and state - Donald E. Russell
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:54:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Donald E. Russell

Butte, Montana

To the Honorable Members of the Religious Liberty Commision;

The history of this great nation, the United States of America, is now at a turning point. Our founders, in the wisdom given them by our Creator, have instituted safeguards to our freedoms and liberties. We have been set apart from the nations of the world by one of these liberties in particular. That freedom, that liberty, is the right of each citizen to follow their individual conscience in the matter of religious practice and choice. This singular freedom, the liberty to worship without interference from government, is God-given and cannot be regulated, abolished, or bound by any human institution. Our forefathers understood, from the history of the Church-State power which ruled this earth during the period of time which historians call the Dark Ages, that in order to guarantee the citizens of this great country the liberty of religion, the Church and the State must, at all costs, be maintained separated. Now, after 250 years of exemplifying Courage, Excellence, Wisdom and Liberty to all in our nation, and to all the world, this current administration is on the verge of repudiating portions of that great document, the Constitution of the United States of America, which has guided us in our unprecedented success.

I will grant you that the exact words, “separation of church and state”, are not found in the constitution, just as the word “millennium” is not found in the Authorized version of the Holy Bible: albeit, the concept is expressed in so plain a manner as to be comprehended by all who are holding the truth of the document to heart, and not seeking to forward a particular popular interpretation. I therefore object to the thrust of your report, of ‘building a bridge’ between the state and the church, and caution the reader, that once the wall of separation is torn down, all manner of evil now manifested by the state (corruption, funding of the murder of unborn human beings, hostility against other countries [read individuals] not of the same ideology, to name a few examples) will be adopted by the church as the floodgates of monetary assistance open. I believe that what the Commission Members intend for good for all citizens by their report, will, in the end, be found to be the facilitating document of untold evil perpetrated on the minority by the majority.

As to religious freedom and liberty to speak our conscience, I find it pitiable that your commission censored and disbarred one of your own members, Carrie Prejean Boller, for voicing her first amendment protected right to free speech, and foresee this act, as history repeats itself, on a grander scale, once a ‘bridge’ is erected where our Founders prefigured none should be.

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denomination's position on the freedom that God has set forth for His people. An excellent treatise on this affair can be found in The National Sunday Law book by A. T. Jones, for those who wish to fully understand the current matter at hand.

I pray our Creator God, the One who inspired the following verse, bless you, guide and direct you as the days we are now living, just before the imminent coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven, are indeed solemn , momentous, and full of import:
"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Sincerely and most Respectfully Yours,
Donald E. Russell

Sent from my mother's iPhone

From: Tiffany Stratte <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Tiffany Stratte
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:57:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I was very troubled to learn that this 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 thinking of people of my own faith and many others, 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 to God. History is clear about what happens when church and state join hands, and it isn't good for either one. Please read the book “The Great Controversy” to see the tradition of what has come before in the name of the church when it is joined with the authority of the state and the effect that has on believers of many denominations and beliefs.

I agree with Pillar of Freedom’s comments. Please don't build that bridge. Keep the wall. It protects the church far more than it constrains it.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Stratte

Yakima, WA

[redacted]

From: Michele DeFalco <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Presidential Religious Liberty Commission - Michele DeFalco
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 14:58:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

“I agree with Pillar of Freedom’s comments. Please implement them.”
In order to keep our country FREE, please keep church and state separate!

First Amendment: 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.

When we become citizens of this nation, at birth or otherwise, we get a warranty. That warranty is supposed to be honored by every government franchise in every village and hamlet of this nation. It is not transferable, and it is good for life. These rights are stated in our Constitution. We have fought for these rights and we shall not give them up. Our nation has a passion for fairness. That passion is evidenced in our Constitution, in the Bill of Rights, in executive orders, in court decisions. But most of all, it courses through the arteries of our culture. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is the centerpiece of virtually all of our religious faiths.

I'm writing, as a lifelong citizen of the USA and a Seventh-day Adventist, to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would take away 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 get politically involved, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches will be competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of to God. This does not benefit the church or the country. Our founding fathers built our country to protect faith, and it's the reason religion has stayed strong here. Let people choose their religion, and choose their God, and do not allow government to persuade its people to choose. Allowing government any bit of involvement in religion will destroy that freedom.

Galatians 5:1 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”
Thank you for your consideration. May God’s will be done.

Sincerely,

Michele DeFalco
from NY

From: Nicholas Miller <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Cc: Jonathan & Kerri Scriven <[redacted]>, Bradford Haas <[redacted]>, "Dr. Nicholas Miller" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Americans' First Freedom by the Center for Law and Public Policy of Washington Adventist University
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:03:22 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Americans'_First_Freedom.pdf

Dear Commissioners,

We respectfully submit our views, both attached and copied below, regarding the "Americans' First Freedom" Report released last month by the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission. Thank you for this opportunity to submit both our appreciation and concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Nicholas Miller
Dr. Jonathan Scriven

A Response to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report "Americans' First Freedom

"Summary: We believe that the draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission offers a forceful and often compelling account of the importance of religious liberty in American life. It rightly seeks to reassert religion as a vital component of the nation's constitutional order and civic culture. At its best, the report reflects a genuine concern for preserving the freedom of conscience and ensuring that religious individuals and institutions are not unjustly excluded from participation in public life. Yet, for all its strengths, the report ultimately suffers from significant historical omissions, analytical imbalances, and a troubling lack of attention to religious minorities outside the Judeo-Christian framework. These shortcomings weaken its credibility and, ironically, risk reproducing the very violations of equal religious liberty that it ostensibly seeks to challenge and prevent.

I. Positive Contributions of the Report

A. Recognition of a Pervasive Secular Ideology. One of the report's most persuasive contributions is its recognition that a form of secular ideology has gained dominance across many sectors of

American society—one that in various ways, marginalized religious belief and religious adherents. The Commission's observation that religion is increasingly treated "as a problem or annoyance to be managed, restricted, or sidelined" captures a real and widely experienced phenomenon. In educational institutions, corporate environments, and certain areas of public policy, religious perspectives are often tolerated only insofar as they align with prevailing secular norms. When they diverge—particularly on contested moral issues such as sexuality, gender identity, or bioethics—religious individuals may face professional or social consequences. The report is right to highlight that this dynamic does not necessarily arise from formal legal prohibitions, but from cultural and institutional pressures that function as de facto constraints on religious expression. The Commission's critique of the so-called "myth of neutrality" is especially valuable. The assumption that secular frameworks represent a neutral baseline, while religious perspectives are inherently biased or sectarian, is philosophically untenable. Secular ideologies themselves embody substantive moral commitments. When these commitments are treated as normative and unquestionable, religious viewpoints are effectively relegated to second-class status. The report is correct to identify this as a distortion of genuine pluralism.

B. Affirmation of Religious Pluralism

Closely related is the report's commendable emphasis on the importance of protecting a healthy religious pluralism. The Commission repeatedly affirms that religious liberty is "for everyone" and that it benefits believers and nonbelievers alike. This is not merely a rhetorical point; it reflects a foundational principle of the American constitutional system.

The strength of the First Amendment lies in its refusal to privilege one faith over another while simultaneously protecting the free exercise of all. In this respect, the Commission is right to call for renewed vigilance in preserving conditions under which diverse religious communities can flourish. Its recognition that pluralism requires not just formal tolerance, but meaningful inclusion in public life, is both accurate and important.

C. Religion as a Conscience for the State

The report also deserves credit for emphasizing the historic role of religion as a moral and prophetic voice in American public life. Its discussion of religion as a "conscience of the state"—drawing on examples from abolitionism to the civil rights movement—highlights a truth that is often forgotten in contemporary debates. Religious conviction has frequently served as a catalyst for reform, challenging unjust laws and calling the nation to live up to its professed ideals.

This insight is particularly significant in a democratic society. If public discourse is limited to purely secular reasoning, it risks excluding deeply held moral perspectives that have historically contributed to the nation's moral development. The Commission's insistence that religious voices should not be silenced, but engaged, is therefore well taken.

II. Critical Concerns

Despite these strengths, the report's analysis has some significant flaws that need to be remedied.

A. A Historically Incomplete Account of Separation

The Commission's treatment of the "wall of separation between church and state" is one of its most problematic aspects. The report portrays this concept as largely a product of Enlightenment thinking, associated with figures like Thomas Jefferson, and suggests that it has been improperly expanded by

modern secularists. While there is some truth in this critique, it is historically incomplete and ultimately misleading.

Long before Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists, the idea of a separation between church and state had been articulated by religious dissenters themselves—most notably Roger Williams, the 17th-century Baptist pastor and founder of Rhode Island. Williams famously wrote of the need to maintain "a wall or hedge of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world."1 This was not a secularist argument for excluding religion from public life, but a deeply theological claim that the purity of the church required protection from state interference.

This dissenting Protestant tradition played a crucial role in shaping American religious liberty. As has been shown by recent scholarship, the Establishment Clause cannot be understood solely as a product of Enlightenment skepticism toward religion. It was also—and perhaps more fundamentally—the result of theological convictions held by Baptists, Quakers, and other dissenting groups who had experienced persecution under established churches.2

By overlooking this religious heritage, the Commission creates a false dichotomy between "secular" separation and "religious" participation. In reality, the principle of disestablishment emerged from within religious thought itself. It was precisely because religion was considered so important that it needed to be protected from the corrupting influence of state power.

This omission matters. Without acknowledging the religious roots of separation, the report risks endorsing a model of church-state relations that insufficiently guards against governmental entanglement with religion—a danger the founders were acutely aware of.

B.Failure to Grapple with Religious Nationalism

If the report's critique of secular ideology is one-sided, its failure to meaningfully engage the dangers of religious or Christian nationalism is even more striking. While the Commission briefly acknowledges the risk of theocracy, this acknowledgment is cursory and lacks substantive analysis.

This omission is not merely academic—it reflects a significant blind spot. The historical record is clear: the entanglement of religious authority with state power has, for much of Western history, resulted in coercion, exclusion, and persecution. From the establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire in the fourth century through the confessional states of early modern Europe, religious establishment invariably led to the marginalization or suppression of dissenting beliefs.

It was precisely this history that informed the framers' decision to adopt the First Amendment. They sought to avoid not primarily secular oppression of religion, which was not really even seen before the French Revolution, but religious domination of the state. The religion clauses were designed to prevent the kind of legal privileging of a particular faith, and the resulting

2 Professor Nicholas Miller demonstrates this in The Religious Roots of the First Amendment (Oxford University Press, 2012). 1 Roger Williams, Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered (London: Gregory Dexter, 1644), 3.

marginalization and abuse of minority faiths, that had characterized European societies for centuries.

Yet the Commission's report gives little attention to contemporary forms of this danger. Indeed, in its own framing and examples, the report often centers almost exclusively on Christian and Jewish concerns. While these communities undoubtedly face real challenges, as well enumerated in the report, the relative absence of other religious traditions—particularly Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and others—is a gap that can hardly be viewed as accidental.

There are occasional token references to non-Christian groups, but they are largely peripheral. The overwhelming focus remains on issues affecting Judeo-Christian communities. This imbalance raises an uncomfortable question: does the report genuinely reflect a commitment to pluralism, or does it subtly, or not so subtly, privilege certain religious, Judeo-Christian identities?
A serious analysis of religious liberty in America today must confront both sides of the equation: the marginalization of religion by secular forces and the potential for religious majorities to dominate minorities. By neglecting the latter, the report presents an incomplete and distorted picture of current challenges and realities.

C. The Most Significant Omission: The Experience of Sikhs and Muslims

The report's most consequential shortcoming, however, lies in what it almost entirely omits. According to data from federal agencies such as the FBI's Hate Crime Statistics and reports from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Department of Justice, Sikhs and Muslims in the United States are among the most frequently targeted religious groups for harassment, discrimination, and violence. (Some reports indicate the Sikh population has the highest numbers of hate crimes against them per capita of any religious group in the U.S.) Anti-Sikh and Muslim bias has been consistently documented in employment, education, law enforcement practices, and public life.
Yet this reality receives virtually no meaningful attention in the Commission's report.
This omission is not a minor oversight; it is a fundamental failure when measured by the Report's own standards. If the purpose of the report is to identify threats to religious liberty, it cannot credibly ignore the experiences of some of the most vulnerable religious minorities in the country. The absence of sustained discussion of anti-Sikh and Muslim discrimination—along with the minimal attention given to other non-Judeo-Christian groups—undermines the report's claim to represent religious liberty "for everyone."
This omission replicates the very dynamic the report criticizes: the marginalization of certain religious communities. By focusing almost entirely on the concerns of majority or historically dominant groups, the report reinforces a hierarchy of religious concern in which some voices are amplified while others are neglected.

In this sense, the report becomes an example of the problem it seeks to address. It critiques a cultural environment that sidelines religious perspectives, yet it sidelines the perspectives of some religious groups within its own analysis.

III.Conclusion: A Call for Revision and Inclusion

The Religious Liberty Commission's report raises important and legitimate concerns about the place of religion in American public life. Its critique of secular ideological dominance, its affirmation of pluralism, and its recognition of religion's role as a moral conscience are all valuable contributions to an ongoing national conversation.
But the report's weaknesses are too significant to overlook. Its incomplete historical account of church-state separation, its failure to seriously engage the dangers of religious nationalism, and—most critically—its omission of the experiences of non-Judeo-Christian religious minorities limit its effectiveness and credibility.
If the Commission is to fulfill its stated mission, it must take seriously the full scope of religious liberty challenges in the United States. This requires a more balanced and historically grounded analysis, as well as a genuine commitment to inclusivity that extends beyond the dominant religious traditions.

Accordingly, the report should be returned to the Commission for further development. A revised version should include a thorough investigation of the challenges faced by religious minorities—especially Muslims, Sikhs, and other frequently targeted groups—and should more fully engage the historical and theological foundations of religious liberty, including the dissenting Protestant traditions that helped shape the First Amendment.

In the United States, religious liberty has never meant protecting only the faith of the majority. From the nation's founding, its promise has rested on the equal dignity of every person's conscience and the equal protection of every religious community. A commission charged with defending religious liberty should reflect that principle. Only then can the report truly serve as a credible and comprehensive defense of religious liberty for all Americans.

Nicholas P. Miller, JD, PhD WAU Honors College Professor of Law and Religion Co-Director of the Center for Law and Public Policy
C.Jonathan Scriven, D. IR, MA Associate Director, WAU Honors CollegeCo-Director of the Center for Law and Public Policy

Washington Adventist University

WASHINGTON ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY
HONORS COLLEGE
Center for Law and Public Policy

A Response to the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Report "Americans' First Freedom"

Summary: We believe that the draft report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission offers a forceful and often compelling account of the importance of religious liberty in American life. It rightly seeks to reassert religion as a vital component of the nation's constitutional order and civic culture. At its best, the report reflects a genuine concern for preserving the freedom of conscience and ensuring that religious individuals and institutions are not unjustly excluded from participation in public life. Yet, for all its strengths, the report ultimately suffers from significant historical omissions, analytical imbalances, and a troubling lack of attention to religious minorities outside the Judeo-Christian framework. These shortcomings weaken its credibility and, ironically, risk reproducing the very violations of equal religious liberty that it ostensibly seeks to challenge and prevent.

I. Positive Contributions of the Report

A. Recognition of a Pervasive Secular Ideology

One of the report's most persuasive contributions is its recognition that a form of secular ideology has gained dominance across many sectors of American society—one that in various ways, marginalized religious belief and religious adherents. The Commission's observation that religion is increasingly treated "as a problem or annoyance to be managed, restricted, or sidelined" captures a real and widely experienced phenomenon.

In educational institutions, corporate environments, and certain areas of public policy, religious perspectives are often tolerated only insofar as they align with prevailing secular norms. When they diverge—particularly on contested moral issues such as sexuality, gender identity, or bioethics—religious individuals may face professional or social consequences. The report is right to highlight that this dynamic does not necessarily arise from formal legal prohibitions, but from cultural and institutional pressures that function as de facto constraints on religious expression.

The Commission's critique of the so-called "myth of neutrality" is especially valuable. The assumption that secular frameworks represent a neutral baseline, while religious perspectives are

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inherently biased or sectarian, is philosophically untenable. Secular ideologies themselves embody substantive moral commitments. When these commitments are treated as normative and unquestionable, religious viewpoints are effectively relegated to second-class status. The report is correct to identify this as a distortion of genuine pluralism.

B. Affirmation of Religious Pluralism

Closely related is the report's commendable emphasis on the importance of protecting a healthy religious pluralism. The Commission repeatedly affirms that religious liberty is "for everyone" and that it benefits believers and nonbelievers alike. This is not merely a rhetorical point; it reflects a foundational principle of the American constitutional system.

The strength of the First Amendment lies in its refusal to privilege one faith over another while simultaneously protecting the free exercise of all. In this respect, the Commission is right to call for renewed vigilance in preserving conditions under which diverse religious communities can flourish. Its recognition that pluralism requires not just formal tolerance, but meaningful inclusion in public life, is both accurate and important.

C. Religion as a Conscience for the State

The report also deserves credit for emphasizing the historic role of religion as a moral and prophetic voice in American public life. Its discussion of religion as a "conscience of the state"—drawing on examples from abolitionism to the civil rights movement—highlights a truth that is often forgotten in contemporary debates. Religious conviction has frequently served as a catalyst for reform, challenging unjust laws and calling the nation to live up to its professed ideals.

This insight is particularly significant in a democratic society. If public discourse is limited to purely secular reasoning, it risks excluding deeply held moral perspectives that have historically contributed to the nation's moral development. The Commission's insistence that religious voices should not be silenced, but engaged, is therefore well taken.

II. Critical Concerns

Despite these strengths, the report's analysis has some significant flaws that need to be remedied.

A. A Historically Incomplete Account of Separation

The Commission's treatment of the "wall of separation between church and state" is one of its most problematic aspects. The report portrays this concept as largely a product of Enlightenment thinking, associated with figures like Thomas Jefferson, and suggests that it has been improperly expanded by modern secularists. While there is some truth in this critique, it is historically incomplete and ultimately misleading.

Long before Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptists, the idea of a separation between church and state had been articulated by religious dissenters themselves—most notably Roger Williams, the 17th-century Baptist pastor and founder of Rhode Island. Williams famously wrote of the need to maintain "a wall or hedge of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world."[1] This was not a secularist argument for excluding religion from public life, but a deeply theological claim that the purity of the church required protection from state interference.

This dissenting Protestant tradition played a crucial role in shaping American religious liberty. As has been shown by recent scholarship, the Establishment Clause cannot be understood solely as a product of Enlightenment skepticism toward religion. It was also—and perhaps more fundamentally—the result of theological convictions held by Baptists, Quakers, and other dissenting groups who had experienced persecution under established churches.[2]

By overlooking this religious heritage, the Commission creates a false dichotomy between "secular" separation and "religious" participation. In reality, the principle of disestablishment emerged from within religious thought itself. It was precisely because religion was considered so important that it needed to be protected from the corrupting influence of state power.

This omission matters. Without acknowledging the religious roots of separation, the report risks endorsing a model of church-state relations that insufficiently guards against governmental entanglement with religion—a danger the founders were acutely aware of.

B. Failure to Grapple with Religious Nationalism

If the report's critique of secular ideology is one-sided, its failure to meaningfully engage the dangers of religious or Christian nationalism is even more striking. While the Commission briefly acknowledges the risk of theocracy, this acknowledgment is cursory and lacks substantive analysis.

This omission is not merely academic—it reflects a significant blind spot. The historical record is clear: the entanglement of religious authority with state power has, for much of Western history, resulted in coercion, exclusion, and persecution. From the establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire in the fourth century through the confessional states of early modern Europe, religious establishment invariably led to the marginalization or suppression of dissenting beliefs.

It was precisely this history that informed the framers' decision to adopt the First Amendment. They sought to avoid not primarily secular oppression of religion, which was not really even seen before the French Revolution, but religious domination of the state. The religion clauses were designed to prevent the kind of legal privileging of a particular faith, and the resulting

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[1] Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (London: Gregory Dexter, 1644), 3.

[2] Professor Nicholas Miller demonstrates this in *The Religious Roots of the First Amendment* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

marginalization and abuse of minority faiths, that had characterized European societies for centuries.

Yet the Commission's report gives little attention to contemporary forms of this danger. Indeed, in its own framing and examples, the report often centers almost exclusively on Christian and Jewish concerns. While these communities undoubtedly face real challenges, as well enumerated in the report, the relative absence of other religious traditions—particularly Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and others—is a gap that can hardly be viewed as accidental.

There are occasional token references to non-Christian groups, but they are largely peripheral. The overwhelming focus remains on issues affecting Judeo-Christian communities. This imbalance raises an uncomfortable question: does the report genuinely reflect a commitment to pluralism, or does it subtly, or not so subtly, privilege certain religious, Judeo-Christian identities?

A serious analysis of religious liberty in America today must confront both sides of the equation: the marginalization of religion by secular forces and the potential for religious majorities to dominate minorities. By neglecting the latter, the report presents an incomplete and distorted picture of current challenges and realities.

C. The Most Significant Omission: The Experience of Sikhs and Muslims

The report's most consequential shortcoming, however, lies in what it almost entirely omits. According to data from federal agencies such as the FBI's Hate Crime Statistics and reports from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the Department of Justice, Sikhs and Muslims in the United States are among the most frequently targeted religious groups for harassment, discrimination, and violence. (Some reports indicate the Sikh population has the highest numbers of hate crimes against them per capita of any religious group in the U.S.) Anti-Sikh and Muslim bias has been consistently documented in employment, education, law enforcement practices, and public life.

Yet this reality receives virtually no meaningful attention in the Commission's report.

This omission is not a minor oversight; it is a fundamental failure when measured by the Report's own standards. If the purpose of the report is to identify threats to religious liberty, it cannot credibly ignore the experiences of some of the most vulnerable religious minorities in the country. The absence of sustained discussion of anti-Sikh and Muslim discrimination—along with the minimal attention given to other non-Judeo-Christian groups—undermines the report's claim to represent religious liberty "for everyone."

This omission replicates the very dynamic the report criticizes: the marginalization of certain religious communities. By focusing almost entirely on the concerns of majority or historically dominant groups, the report reinforces a hierarchy of religious concern in which some voices are amplified while others are neglected.

In this sense, the report becomes an example of the problem it seeks to address. It critiques a cultural environment that sidelines religious perspectives, yet it sidelines the perspectives of some religious groups within its own analysis.

III. Conclusion: A Call for Revision and Inclusion

The Religious Liberty Commission's report raises important and legitimate concerns about the place of religion in American public life. Its critique of secular ideological dominance, its affirmation of pluralism, and its recognition of religion's role as a moral conscience are all valuable contributions to an ongoing national conversation.

But the report's weaknesses are too significant to overlook. Its incomplete historical account of church-state separation, its failure to seriously engage the dangers of religious nationalism, and—most critically—its omission of the experiences of non-Judeo-Christian religious minorities limit its effectiveness and credibility.

If the Commission is to fulfill its stated mission, it must take seriously the full scope of religious liberty challenges in the United States. This requires a more balanced and historically grounded analysis, as well as a genuine commitment to inclusivity that extends beyond the dominant religious traditions.

Accordingly, the report should be returned to the Commission for further development. A revised version should include a thorough investigation of the challenges faced by religious minorities—especially Muslims, Sikhs, and other frequently targeted groups—and should more fully engage the historical and theological foundations of religious liberty, including the dissenting Protestant traditions that helped shape the First Amendment.

In the United States, religious liberty has never meant protecting only the faith of the majority. From the nation's founding, its promise has rested on the equal dignity of every person's conscience and the equal protection of every religious community. A commission charged with defending religious liberty should reflect that principle. Only then can the report truly serve as a credible and comprehensive defense of religious liberty for all Americans.

Nicholas P. Miller, JD, PhD
WAU Honors College Professor of Law and Religion
Co-Director of the Center for Law and Public Policy

C. Jonathan Scriven, D. IR, MA
Associate Director, WAU Honors College
Co-Director of the Center for Law and Public Policy

Washington Adventist University

From: Efigee <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT –Separation of Church and State – Sheila Figgins
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:05:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my concern about the recent guidelines recommended by the Commission to remove the wall of separation between Church and State and instead replace it with a bridge.

I am a Seventh Day Adventist Christian who understands that the wall was created for the protection of believers and non-believers alike. The founding fathers and people like Roger Williams who was a devout Christian understood the dangers of this type of legislation. When the government enforces religious beliefs, the results lead to marginalization of citizens and even worse persecution.

I am sincerely requesting that the bridge not be built and that we keep the wall so that our country remains a place where Christians are free to worship according to the dictates of their conscience and that those who choose not to believe continue to have that God given right.

Remember, Jesus said that His Kingdom is not of this world and to give unto to Caesar what is Caesars. Let's keep the church and state separated by a wall.

Sincerely,
Sheila Figgins

From: richard Kearns <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Richard Kearns
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:07:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen of College Place, Washington, to urge this Commission to hold firmly to both halves of the First Amendment's promise on religion: no establishment, and free exercise for all. I want to begin with something that troubles me whenever I hear the founding principle of keeping church and state apart dismissed because those exact words appear nowhere in the Constitution. The presumption of innocence is not spelled out there either, yet no one doubts it governs our courts. The absence of a phrase does not erase a principle woven into the founding itself. Losing this one would not be a minor legal adjustment; it would fracture the unity that has let Americans of every faith and no faith live as one nation.

The historical record bears this out in detail. The push for separation came not from skeptics but from churches that had felt establishment pressing down on them from underneath - the Presbytery of Hanover, the Baptists, the Quakers. Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention plainly that there was not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion, and that its least interference would be a flagrant usurpation. The founders did not wait for a full establishment to take root before objecting; as Madison wrote, they saw all the consequences in the principle and avoided the consequences by denying the principle. Any commission that would enlist the founders on behalf of state-sponsored religion must first explain away Madison in Madison's own words.

History also shows what happens when sincere majorities enforce religion through law. Salem's judges were devout and certain, and still committed monstrous injustice against the innocent. Centuries later, in 1892, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers for quietly plowing their own fields on a Sunday after having already rested on their own Sabbath - marching three of them, one sixty-two years old, through the streets in a chain gang, while trainloads of workmen passed the jail every Sunday undisturbed. The lesson is not that these enforcers were wicked people. It is that good intentions offer no protection once the machinery of religious enforcement is built, because someone else will eventually hold the controls.

There is a deeper reason government cannot rightly hold this power at all. Our whole system rests on the idea that just government derives its authority from the consent of the governed - powers the people delegate. But no person can delegate his relationship to God to anyone else, not even to a government he trusts. I cannot authorize another to believe for me or answer for my soul. Since that power was never given, it was never received. The First Amendment did not invent this exclusion; it simply recorded a boundary that was already there, built into what people are even capable of handing over to their government.

Finally, I hold this conviction as a matter of faith itself, not despite it. When Christ said to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, he drew a line no earthly power may cross. Civil government may rightly ask whether an act injures a neighbor; it has no business asking whether an act is religious, irreligious, or heretical. When government backs a particular text, display, or lesson, it does not become too religious for a secular state - it violates the very line that Christianity itself teaches must be kept.

I had this same conversation with Charlie Kirk before he died. Unfortunately we have forgotten Roger Williams' contribution and will regress into the same intolerance that existed before he erected this wall of separation in Rhode Island which was adopted by the founding fathers.

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

together.

Respectfully,
Richard Kearns
College Place, WA
PII

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Follow Up – William Guthrie
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:09:22 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

This is a follow up to my comment submitted on Sunday July 12, 2026.

I write as a citizen of the United States of America, Seventh-Day Adventist Christian and practicing physician.

While I appreciate addressing the issues around freedom to practice medicine according to conscience and regarding issues of coercion and denying religious exemptions for vaccination, I am still very concerned by the draft report's conflicting messages. On the one hand it seeks to protect religious liberty while on the other speaking against maintaining separation between church and state. It especially promotes concepts that directly violate the establishment clause.

I agree with the Pillar of Freedom's comments. I asked that you please reconsider your approach and conclusions. If separation of church and state is eroded in any way, whether that be through promoting religious activities or religious education with tax dollars, this is a threat to liberty everywhere. Contrary to the draft report, we must maintain an absolute wall of separation between church and state. This includes the secular religions of Darwinism and atheism and secularism and spiritualism. We must not discriminate when enforcing religious liberty and separation of church and state. No religious body or group should receive partial treatment in maintaining this separation.

Respectfully,

William Guthrie, MD

From: Laurie Erickson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Laurie Erickson
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:09:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

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 (Hereinafter "RLC") Draft Report, Issued June 2026

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

I am a devout Seventh-day Adventist Christian American, and a recently returned missionary after serving 17 years in a remote village with the people in Papua New Guinea. I belong to a church that is in the minority because we keep the Bible seventh-day Sabbath holy as given at the end of the creation week and are reminded of in the fourth commandment. This belief and practice naturally sets people in our denomination up for persecution by other Christians who worship on Sunday, secular people and governments of other countries.

In the United States of America we have been privileged to have the freedom to freely worship God as the Creator according to the Bible teachings. This freedom was fought for by the founding fathers of our country, many of whom had escaped religious persecution in Europe. Because the church in Europe was connected with state powers, there was not freedom to worship God according to one's conscience and there was much persecution. Those people sought religious freedom in America, yet even here religious persecution arose due to differences in beliefs. Thanks to Roger Williams and his work, Rhode Island soon became a haven for Baptists, Quakers and Jews.

Later the Constitution and the Bill of rights were written. The first amendment reads, *"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."* This is separation of church and state! This is a wall that needs to remain in place.

As a christian, I do not want the government involved and be able to control my beliefs. That means no religious instruction in public schools, funding of religious clubs on public campuses and no funding of religious non-

profit activities. I object to repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts a church's political activities and request that the Johnson Amendment be fully enforced.

I appeal to you to not take our country back to the dark ages. Please let us retain the religious freedom that keeps church and state separate as set up in the first amendment. This freedom is what makes America truly great.

Sincerely,

Laurie Erickson

Berrien Springs, Michigan

From: Jorge Baute <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Jorge Baute
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:10:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

My name is Jorge Baute and I am the pastor of the Whiteville and Elizabethtown Seventh-day Adventist Churches located in Whiteville and Elizabethtown in the beautiful state of North Carolina. I have served for more than 26 years as pastor, youth pastor, Bible teacher and History teacher. Today I write to express my own views, not as an official representative of my denomination, though the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a long history of upholding the principles of Religious Liberty. As a student of history and Bible prophecy, as well as being the son of Cuban refugee parents who escaped the Godless communist government of Cuba, and fled to this blessed land of freedom, I feel it my duty to write.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission who recognize the importance of religious liberty. Please know that I keep my government leaders in my prayers. I wish thank you for the opportunity to express my deep concern regarding a recommended move to remove the wall of separation between church and state. This foundational principle has been part of the secret of America's power and prosperity for 250 years. It was the Lord Jesus Himself who established this vital principle when He said in Matthew 22:21 *"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."* Here the Lord made a clear delineation between the *"things that are Caesar's"* (the government's) and the *"things that are God's"* (the church). The Lord spoke of His Kingdom not being of this world (John 18:36) while at the same time acknowledging through the apostle Paul that earthly government is established by God for our good. (Rom. 13:1-7). The Lord God has given both church and government differing tasks and they are to remain separate in those tasks.

History is replete with examples of what happens when this vital principle is violated as is clearly brought out in the story of Europe in what historians refer to as the Dark Ages, or the Middle Ages. This period saw the persecution of religious minority groups that led many to seek the shores of America to establish a nation upon the broad principles of Religious Freedom, but Bible prophecy points out that one day those freedoms will be threatened. In Revelation chapter 13, the Lord warned His people through the apostle John that a power would arise in the last days that would force worship on its citizens. The following is found in Revelation 13:15-17 "*He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."* Here God's word warns that one day a political entity would use its power to enforce worship. The combination of church and state, however noble may be the original intent, has historically ended in evil and one day, will again.

I urge the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission to please not make this recommendation. If matters need refining, or adjusting, I can understand, but to repudiate this principle will be disastrous to this beloved nation and its citizens.

I wish to express my humble gratitude once again for providing me the opportunity to comment on this vitally important matter.

Jorge Baute

Pastor, Whiteville and Elizabethtown Seventh-day Adventist Churches. Whiteville and Elizabethtown, North Carolina.

From: Curtis Farnham <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Curtis D. Farnham
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:16:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I urge you to reject the core recommendations of the *Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission* that would weaken the separation of church and state, particularly by funding religious nonprofits and religious education with taxpayer dollars and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Like many Christians, I hold that Jesus Christ is divine, and that His death and resurrection atone for sin. My objections to this report are historical and theological. Scripture teaches that God wants worship freely given, not coerced. Christ Himself drew the line between these two authorities when He said, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). He never sought Caesar's help to advance His own kingdom. He told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The First Amendment's guarantee that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" isn't a secular add-on to faith. It's what protects faith's authenticity. The moment government starts funding or favoring religion, it starts refereeing between different religions, deciding whose worship is legitimate. That isn't protection; it's a step toward state-defined religion, which is never genuine worship. It's compliance.

History bears this out. Wherever church and state have merged, the result has been persecution. Europe's soil is soaked with the blood of thousands upon thousands of martyrs -- those who worshiped differently than their government demanded. In a stroke of inspired genius, our Founding Fathers broke that pattern by keeping the two separate. It’s no wonder that since then, almost all developed nations have added their own strong religious liberty protections. It’s an idea that’s vital for peace. Do we really want to test this again?

Even Benjamin Franklin recognized this danger. He wrote, "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 oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one." A faith that needs taxpayer subsidy to thrive has already lost something essential, and there’s nothing the government can do to make up for it.

As for repealing the Johnson Amendment, it would compound the problem: it would make churches financially and politically dependent on politicians instead of accountable to God, trading spiritual integrity for political access. And singling out any one religion for government preference, even one I might agree with theologically, guarantees that some other faith, and eventually mine, ends up on the wrong side of that preference. Separation of church and state was built by people of faith, to protect faith. It's how we keep both church and state free. Preserving that separation, not weakening it, is what truly makes America great.

Sincerely,
Curtis D. Farnham
Fallbrook, California, USA

From: Cheryl Trenholm <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on the The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:17:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my sincere concern regarding the steps being taken to erode the separation of church and state outlined in this draft. I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and believer in the Bible as the infallible Word of God. I am also a sinner and in desperate need of the continual healing power of Jesus in my life. God is love and the only true form of love allows free will and choice. I want to be able to freely make that choice and I will continue to advocate for my neighbor to have that same opportunity, even if they choose differently.

There isn't a person on this planet that God doesn't love and that He alone isn't capable of reaching. I am not on the side of secular ideology that wants to shut out the very mention of God, let alone His instruction. However, God says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15, KJV. God allows for our personal choice and therefore, we must allow it for others. Enforcing compliance through politics is not the answer. God is not a Republican, Democrat or Liberal. His ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isaiah 58:8-9, KJV). Much higher.

I completely disagree with repealing the Johnson Amendment. There is no place for politics in the pulpit. Period. Politics are divisive enough as it is. Rarely do individuals change the minds or actions of others. However, the Holy Spirit often does (Acts 1:8). if we are willing to submit to the transformative power of God.

I also do not agree with the expansion of funding for religious organizations that are engaging in religious activities as I find this to be a conflict of interest and will only lead to corrupt competition for funding. Those who receive the most funding will inevitably retain the most influence. The Bible teaches that God owns the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalms 50:10-12). If willing and humble hearts submit to God, there is nothing that He can't accomplish. There is no need for the government to oversee God's resources.

The conflicts of interest in both of these proposed changes are palpable. Human behavior is naturally against the Heavenly Government of God and the desire for power and control will inevitably rise to the occasion. True and lasting change only comes from personal individual convictions and decisions. Not from forced indoctrination. I am deeply concerned that should this wall be torn down, and religion begin to mingle with politics and political funding, that the Government will eventually be put in the position to make rulings on doctrinal issues. Which would be a direct violation of Religious Liberty! Remember the Protestant Reformation and the desire to escape religious persecution. Perhaps, James Madison said it best, "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."

I would also like to take this opportunity to say that I am in agreement with previous statements made by Jonathan Zirkle, Pillar of Freedom and Alexander Bowen Heritage of Hope Ministries regarding the continued need for separation of church and state. These individuals are well-studied in the history of our Nation and humble servants of God.

I request that you prayerfully reconsider and keep church and state separate as it was intended from the beginning.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Trenholm

From: Raquel Smith <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Raquel Smith
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:18:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a child in the 5th grade, I remember learning the history of the pilgrims settling in the new world to escape religious persecution by the Church/State power in England. Many of them died on the way, and many did not survive the rough conditions once settled in New England. Unfortunately, the very political and ecclesiastical system which they fled from, they sought to establish but under their own banner of Christianity and doctrines. This led them to now be the persecutors of those who disagreed with them! It was not until the founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams who believed in the separation of church and state and who paved the way for religious liberty, or as he termed it, Soul Liberty that the New World truly began to shine rays of hope for the oppressed and persecuted. Freedom of conscience is dependent upon the separation of church and state, and this is what Roger Williams demonstrated and argued for all his life.
As a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, I am alarmed to see the denial of this evident truth within the Religious Liberty Commission. The truth which should be the very foundation of your commission, and which to me defines religious liberty is that which is being completely undermined and disregarded. This seems to be paradoxical to your mission.
Please do not allow the government to become involved in promoting any religious services or activities through the means of resources or funds. Whether this be atheistic ideology or religious of any kind. The government should be involved in encouraging its citizens to respect all faiths, to treat all people equally and to facilitate and protect the people's rights including their freedom of conscience.
Please do not dismantle the Johnson Amendment. Churches are not political tools to become entangled in the corruption of politics. There should be no bridge constructed between the churches and the government. Let true religion come from the heart and not be forced by the legislation or coercion of the state.

Thank you,
Raquel Smith
Graysville, TN

From: Carrie Joye <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment-Religious Liberty Commission Report-Carrie Joye
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:27:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in response to the Religious Liberty Commision Document claim that there is no founding belief in church and state separation in America and that there should not be. While those exact words are not found written in our Constitution, the founding fathers understood that a government that is united with religion would lead to great persecution and infringe on each citizen's right to worship God based on the dictates of his own conscience, and they took great care to establish laws that would protect the American citizen. There are many religions in which a believer truly feels that his theology is correct; therefore, it is a recipe for disaster to remove government boundaries that our amendments have established in regards to freedom of worship. I am a Christian, and even within Christianity there are different views of God's character and how He should be worshipped, though the Bible is explicit in these matters. My point is simply this: no government or committee has the right to force anyone by law to have a certain view of, or relationship with, God, nor should there be changes made to our Constitution or "bridges built" between the church and the state that would enact and enforce universal religious laws upon our citizens. In his Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments, James Madison stated, "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?". While our founding fathers were predominantly Christian, they understood the importance of being able to worship God according to the dictates of one's own conscience, and this right was to be endowed upon every citizen no matter their religious beliefs.

When certain religious beliefs are deemed more important than others, especially if the government is who deems them so, rights are infringed upon. This happens gradually and often begins innocently, with good intentions. For example, Emperor Constantine of Rome helped stop the persecution of Christians in the 3rd century. However in 321 AD , he established a law that was meant to unify, but would over a process of time lead to terrible persecution of Christians from 538AD to 1798. Even in our own country, blue laws were put in place in the colonies beginning in 1610 that restricted certain activity being done on Sundays. Though the Constitution was formed later, many of these places still had these laws on their books, as do many now. In the late 1800's, over 100 Seventh Day Adventist Christians were arrested because of working on Sunday-many privately working within their own properties. Among these were Samuel Mitchell who was arrested and died in prison 15 days after his arrest in July 1878. Robert M. King was another who was arrested and heavily fined in June 1889. Both of these men were working on their own private properties, but because of government issued religious laws, they, along with others, were arrested and some severely punished for their own personal religious beliefs. I am a Seventh Day Adventist Christian as well, and we choose to worship God on Saturday , the 7th day of creation, as we believe the Bible states. Sunday, the first day of the week, we believe is one of the 6 days we are to labor. I also am aware of plans to enact Sunday blue laws again, which is a major reason I decided to comment on this committee's desire to do away with the boundaries the government has with religion. These boundaries must stay in tact, and this separation does not need to be bridged if we are to continue to enjoy the liberties of conscience we have had in this great nation.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am proud to be a citizen of the great country of America. I respect and honor the founders and leaders of this nation. However, I strongly disagree with any form of government interference or relationship with church and/or religion. God Himself does not force men to follow Him, for He created us with the free will to choose. He does, however, ask whosever that will to come to Him, and when they do He writes His laws on our hearts, that we may love and honor Him, and love our neighbor and treat them respectfully, no matter what religion he happens to be. I prayerfully hope that this committee will consider and heed the words of Jesus Christ who died for EVERY man and render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's (Matthew 22;15-22); to not bridge the gap between church and state, but to keep them separated; to honor the liberties and inalienable rights that each citizen has been endowed with- to speak freely, to worship freely, to be an American.

Sincerely,
Carrie Joye

From: chris fajardo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:28:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Committee on Religious Liberty,

Thank you for your willingness to serve on the Presidential Committee on Religious Liberty. I appreciate that this foundational American freedom is receiving thoughtful attention.

As our nation commemorates its 250th anniversary, I have found myself reflecting on how blessed I am to be an American. As a practicing member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I thank God for the privilege of living in a country where I have been free to worship according to the convictions of my conscience, without government interference. Of all the liberties we enjoy as Americans, religious freedom is the one I cherish most.

My faith places a strong emphasis on the sacredness of freedom of conscience. It also teaches the importance of learning from history. The Protestant Reformation and countless other chapters of history remind us that when civil governments become closely intertwined with religious matters, sincere people often lose the freedom to follow their convictions. Those lessons have shaped my deep appreciation for the wisdom of our nation's founders in protecting religious liberty for people of every faith—and for those of no faith at all.

While I understand that this Committee exists to strengthen religious liberty, I respectfully ask that you also consider the precedents your work may establish for future generations. Good intentions today can become unintended consequences tomorrow if government is given authority in matters of conscience. Freedom is no longer true freedom when it is directed, compelled, or defined by the state.

As I look at our nation today, I worry that we are gradually forgetting the principles upon which America was built. I pray that our leaders will remember the courage and wisdom of those who understood that faith must always remain a matter of individual conviction, never government coercion.

My prayer is that your work will preserve the God-given right of every American to worship freely—or not at all—according to the dictates of conscience. If we remain faithful to that principle, we will honor not only our Constitution but also the enduring legacy of liberty that has made America a beacon of hope for generations.

Thank you for your service and for considering the concerns of citizens like myself.

Respectfully,

Chris Fajardo

From: Lance Mack <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Lance Mack
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:28:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing to you in regards to the upcoming vote eliminating church and state separation in the US Constitution and replacing it with a bridge between church and state. I'm sure you realize the US Constitution currently provides for separation of church and state in the First Amendment even though the words aren't specifically spelled out, but the principle is covered.

This separation of the church and state principle is a protection for all people, whether Christian, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, or other. To remove the protection that has existed for 250 years is opening the door for all kinds of changes in this great country, including persecution. I've been a Seventh-day Adventist all my life and have served in the Seventh-day Adventist church for most of my adult life. The separation of church and state is a foundation we count on. We believe in religious freedom for all people. So please consider not making this change to the US Constitution, even though it may appear to be a minor change the result can be devastating. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lance Mack
Eau Claire, MI

From: Karl Tsatalbasidis <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Karl Tsatalbasidis
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:33:09 -0400
Importance: High

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a minister of the Seventh-day Adventist church, yet the thoughts expressed here are my own. I am currently waiting to become a citizen of this amazing country. One of the things that has most impressed me about the United States of America is its Constitution and Bill of Rights, specifically the 1st Amendment. The rights afforded us in those documents do not come from the state; they were not based on the Enlightenment; they come from God. Also, when I compare the US Constitution and Bill of Rights to the Canadian Charter of Rights, the latter makes a loophole in the charter itself that allows the majority to overturn the fundamental rights of the minority. The previous Prime Minister of Canada exploited this loophole in the Charter, and the media was successful in shaping public policy, thereby preventing people of faith from exercising their religious rights. By contrast, the United States Bill of Rights informs us that on its face, our rights are inalienable! They are not subject to the vote of the majority. I believe the Founding Fathers of this nation put together the most amazing document ever produced in modern history concerning the relationship between church and state. However, I am deeply disturbed by the commission's proposal to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge."

The concept of a wall of separation between church and state is actually based on Jesus's statement in Matt 22:15-22 where the Lord states that we should render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's and to God the things which are God's. This means that there are some things that are to be rendered only to God and not to Caesar; neither are we to render the things that belong to God through Caesar. This implies a wall of separation between what is owed to God and what is owed to Caesar. The fact that the Establishment Clause has been weaponized to stop people of faith from expressing the free exercise of their religion in the public sphere such as halls of government and education does not mean we should reinterpret the establishment clause to mean that there is no separation of church and state. Such a decision is based on revisionist American history and a terrible neglect of what took place throughout the centuries when church and state combined.

Let's start with those who ignored Jesus's statement in Matt 22:15-22. The edict of Milan in 313AD declared that the entire body of Christians whose property was unjustly taken by the empire could have their properties returned and were free to worship according to the dictates of their conscience. However, while the ink on that document had still not dried, the Catholic Bishops started an argument concerning what constitutes a Christian. The end result was that only Christians that were defined to be such by the Catholic Church were entitled to a return of their property. But, the Edict of Milan, 313, named "the whole body of Christians" as the beneficiaries, without any qualification or any sectarian designation. That quickly changed when the Catholic Church was designated as "the Catholic Church of the Christians," "the holy Catholic Church," and the "most holy religion." Thus, eleven years after the Edict of Milan, the Catholic Church stood in full and exclusive possession of the authority of the empire both in the rights of property and the right to worship under the profession of Christianity, and with a specific and direct commission to use that power and authority to compel the submission of “heretics” such as the Donatists. And it all came from the Edict of Milan bestowing governmental favors upon "the Christians."

Furthermore, the bishops of the 4th century employed Sunday laws like Constantine's in 321AD in order to establish a theocracy. First, the church had all work on Sunday forbidden, in order that the people might attend to things divine. But the people went to the circus and the theater instead of to church. Then the church had laws enacted closing the circuses and the theaters, in order that the people might attend to things divine. But even then the people would not be devoted, nor attend to things divine, for they had no real religion. The next step to be taken, therefore, in the logic of the situation, was to compel them to be devoted—to compel them to attend to things divine. This was the next step logically to be taken, and it was taken. The theocratical bishops were equal to the occasion. They were ready with a theory that exactly met the demands of the case, and the great Catholic Church father and Catholic saint, Augustine, was the father of this Catholic saintly theory. He wrote: “It is indeed better that men should be brought to serve God by instruction than by fear of punishment, or by pain. But because the former means are better, the latter must not, therefore, be neglected. Many must often be brought back to their Lord, like wicked servants, by the rod of temporal suffering, before they attain to the highest grade of religious development.”-Schaff’s Church History, Vol. II, sec. 27. Of this theory Neander remarks:- “It was by Augustine, then, that a theory was proposed and founded which .... contained the germ of that whole system of spiritual despotism, of intolerance and persecution, which ended in the tribunals of the Inquisition.”-Church History, p. 217. The history of the Inquisition is only the history of the carrying out of this infamous theory of Augustine's. But this theory is only the logical sequence of the theory upon which the whole series of Sunday laws was founded.

Such were some of the attempts to make a "bridge" between church and state in the 4th century, which led to the deaths of millions throughout the Middle Ages. However, similar movements were on foot here in America in the 19th century. On February 29, 1892, the Supreme Court declared that the United States is a “Christian nation.” Justification to support their claim was based on state constitutions and on Colonial Charters and historical documents such as the commission to Christopher Columbus from Ferdinand and Isabella, whose authority is actually based on the fraudulent Donation of Constantine through which the Catholic Church gained the Papal States via grand larceny on a scale that has never been equaled. The Donation allegedly granted the papacy authority over all "western lands and islands of the sea." However, why should the national Constitution be interpreted and construed according to the purposes of Ferdinand, Isabella, Elizabeth, and her successors, the Puritans, and the constitutions of the States, instead of the purposes of Jefferson, Madison, Washington, and the other fathers who made it?

In accordance with this opinion, the meaning of the Constitution includes: (1) the maintenance of the discipline of the churches by the civil power; (2) the requirement of the religious oath; (3) the requirement of the religious test oath as a qualification for office; (4) public taxation for the support of religion and religious teachers; (5) the requirement of a belief in the Trinity and the inspiration of “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments;” (6) the guilt of blasphemy upon everyone who speaks or acts in contempt of the established religion; and (7) laws for the observance of Sunday, with the general cessation of all “secular business.”

What's interesting to note is that prior to 1892, the Catholic Church rejected the Constitution. The Catholic World in 1871 stated, ""“As it is interpreted by the liberal and sectarian journals that are doing their best to revolutionize it, and is beginning to be interpreted by no small portion of the American people, or is interpreted by the Protestant principle, so widely diffused among us, ... we do not accept it, or hold it to be any government at all, or as capable of performing the proper functions of government; and if it continues to be interpreted by the revolutionary principles of Protestantism, it is sure to fail.... Hence it is, we so often say, that if the American republic is to be sustained and preserved at all, it must be by the rejection of the principle of the Reformation, and the acceptance of the Catholic principle by the American people.”

On September 5, 1893, Francis Satolli delivered the following message from Pope Leo XIII: The Pope encouraged the Catholics of America to go forward, in one hand bearing the book of Christian truth, and in the other the Constitution of the United States. In a sermon delivered by Father Lyons in the Catholic Mirror in Baltimore, he states very clearly the difference between Protestant principles and Roman Catholic principles. "It is strange," he declares, "that a rule which requires a Supreme Court to give final decisions on disputed points in our Constitution should be abused and slandered when employed by the Catholic Church. Citizens and others may read the Constitution, but they are not allowed to interpret it for themselves but must submit to the interpretation given by the Superior [Supreme(?)] Court. The Bible is the constitution of the Catholic Church, and while all are exhorted to read this divine Constitution, the interpretation of its true meaning must be left to the Superior Court of the church founded by Christ. The decision of our federal Supreme Court is final; the decision of the superior court of the church is final also, and, in virtue of the divine prerogative of inerrancy granted the church, infallible. The church has not, does not, and cannot permit the violation of God’s commandments in any case whatsoever.” While the Constitution was founded on the Protestant Principle, no Catholic was ever commanded by any pope to take that Constitution in one hand and the Bible in the other for any purpose under the sun. On the contrary, they openly declared that so long as the Constitution was held to that principle, Catholics did “not accept it,” nor hold this government “to be any government at all.”

Unfortunately, Protestantism in the 19th century was following suit with Catholicism and with earlier 4th-century developments. The Women's Temperance Christian Union and the National Reform Movement argued that every government is a government of God and is as truly and really a theocracy as the commonwealth of Israel. In this theocracy, the preachers are the successors of the prophets, and in the work they are undertaking for the Sabbath (Sunday legislation), they styled themselves as the representatives of God. In this scenario, "governments do not derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."

Also, Sunday laws, as the means to gain control of the civil power, are the same as what was employed in the 4th century. In order to get people to come to church, the Sunday papers, post office, and trains must be stopped. In the 4th century, when they succeeded in stopping everything on Sunday, they compelled the people to attend to divine things.

Someone asked, but will this not lead to persecution of those that believe differently, such as was practiced by Rome against true Christians? Dr. McAllister stated that true religion never persecutes. Since the National Reform religion is the true religion, compelling men to conform to it is not persecution. But this has been the same argument the papacy has used for centuries! In the state of Arkansas, where I'm currently living, there were laws in the late 19th century that strictly enforced Sunday observance. The result was that many good persons were imprisoned, lost their property, and in some cases, even lost their lives. Dr. McAllister argued: "It is better that a few should suffer than that the whole nation should lose its sabbath." This argument was identical to that which was used by the Pharisees in Christ's day. They said, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." John 11:50.

It is also disingenuous to state that the separation of church and state was merely alluded to by Jefferson in his letter to the Danbury Baptists but has no or little support among the framers and founding fathers. In Jefferson's letter, it's clear 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, 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 & State.” Jefferson was preceded by Roger Williams who fully articulated this idea in 1644. The separation of church and state is further echoed by Madison, Washington, George Bancroft, and by Alexis de Tocqueville's observation in 1831-2 that all clergy and laity alike gave credit to the separation of church and state for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in the United States.

The movement for Sunday laws and a theocratic form of government was stopped in the 19th century by a few Seventh-day Adventists like AT Jones. On April 9, 2026, Marco Rubio claimed that Catholicism played a significant role in shaping America on the basis of Catholic social doctrine like the "common good." He argued that America’s founding principles come from the same traditions as Augustine and Aquinas. Thus, just like in the 4th century, when Catholics described the U.S. as a Christian nation, they interpret that on the basis of Catholic principles and then sell that as being part of the Constitution! They did the same in the 19th century when the Supreme Court concluded that this is a Christian nation.

I respectfully request, therefore, that the Department of Justice not adopt the recommendation to build a bridge between church and state, nor to remove the Johnson Amendment. Instead, I request the committee to 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.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Karl Tsatalbasidis, PhD
Latest Book - Models of Liturgy in an Ecumenical Age:
https://bloomsburycp3.codemantra.com/viewer/696fad24713c0900016ae619

From: Robert Sierra <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church & State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:33:29 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: RLC_Ltr.doc
Inline-Images: image.jpeg

Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – SEPARATION OF CHURCH & STATE – ROBERT SIERRA

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing to express my opposition to the Commission's recommendations to weaken the separation of church and state, particularly through the repeal of the Johnson Amendment.

I believe the Johnson Amendment serves an important purpose by helping to keep houses of worship focused on their spiritual missions rather than partisan political activity. Repealing it would invite greater politicization of America's churches, potentially dividing congregations along political lines and diminishing the moral independence that allows religious organizations to speak with integrity.

I am also concerned about recommendations that could expand government funding of religious organizations. While faith-based organizations often provide valuable services to their communities, increasing financial entanglement between government and religious institutions risks undermining the independence of both. History has repeatedly shown that when churches become financially dependent upon or politically aligned with the state, corruption and compromised religious witness often follow. Churches can find themselves answering more to government priorities than to God.

I personally believe the Johnson Amendment should not only remain in place but should be fully enforced. It provides appropriate safeguards that help preserve both religious liberty and public trust.

I firmly support religious freedom for all people. That includes those of every faith tradition as well as those who choose not to practice any religion. Our nation's commitment to religious liberty is strongest when the government neither favors nor interferes with religious belief.

As a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I am especially mindful of my denomination's long history of defending religious liberty since 1901. The department in the Seventh-day Adventist Church responsible for championing religious freedom has advocated for the rights of people of many different faiths—because genuine religious liberty belongs to everyone, not just to one denomination. This tradition recognizes that protecting freedom of conscience requires maintaining clear boundaries between religious institutions and the state.

The separation of church and state is not a secular invention designed to diminish religion. Rather, it is a principle embraced by many people of faith to safeguard religion from government control and political manipulation. It has helped make the United States a place where diverse religious communities have flourished without state interference.

If we wish to preserve the religious freedom our nation has long professed and protected, we must continue to maintain a meaningful separation between church and state. That separation protects both our democratic institutions and our religious communities. I respectfully urge the Commission to reconsider recommendations that would weaken these longstanding protections and instead support policies that preserve the independence, integrity, and freedom of both church and government.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert Sierra



Foxboro, MA

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and instead support policies that preserve the independence, integrity, and freedom of both church and government.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Robert Sierra



Foxboro, MA

From: Mitchell Williams <mitch.williams@nccsda.com>
To: "rlc@usdoj.gov" <rlc@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:39:25 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: image001.png

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,

Mitch Williams
Lead Pastor

THE HILL

Pleasant Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church

PII

From [redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:40:00 -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. 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.

A Concerned member of the Seventh Day Adventist church

From: tammy dresser <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:52:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Presidential Commission,

Thank you for taking the time for my comment today.

I do agree with this commission that we need more God in our country. But just by telling people there is a new rule or law will not move the needle so to speak on TRUE faith. The people have to want to have God in their lives and invite Him to come in, to make the kind of change you seem to be looking for. Free will is what God gave us it's what makes us different from animals we can chose.

I am a proud citizen of the United States, born and raised here, who loves the Lord and am happy to be called a Seventh Day Adventist by choice.
In thinking about my comments, my thoughts drifted to what Jesus said in the book of Matthew, He said when He was being tested by the Leaders of His day, "Give unto Cesar the things that are Cesars, and unto God the things that are Gods". I am wondering if this might be one of the first instances of the actual division of Church and State. It specifically states there are things that the state should have a part in and things that only He should hold. When it comes to religious liberty He freely gives and receives. When the State gets involved in church business there are generally things that they as a church body you can no longer do, freely. Usually with the states monetary involvement come certain stipulations. Not all bad not all good. With that being said, in regard to the Johnson Amendment: I would like to request that it remains fully in force. Politics should not play a role from our pulpits.

This year's 250th anniversary has brought a lot of our history to the forefront. People tend to forget what brought us here to begin with. Our forefathers were fleeing religious persecution that was being imposed on them thru a religious organization the Catholic Church system that was fully married to the state. With that marriage came horrific persecution. Millions of citizens were persecuted and killed because they believed something other than what the state thru the church required. If we should have learned anything in this past 250 years of freedom it should be that if we do not learn from the past, we are destined to repeat its horrific mistakes.

I pay my taxes to the state as they ask of me because I love my country, and, we have no choice but to pay them, lol. In return, I do not feel that the money I give should go to fund religious or educational institutions that I personally may disagree with. These are not what my taxes are being paid for, it should be Services and infrastructure etc. God gives us the prerogative to choose who, how and what we believe in, and my hard work should not fund religious schools or

institutions that are contrary to my beliefs. The comingling of all these different things is a real problem for me. The commission you have assembled stated that they would like to increase government funding to religious institutions I feel it would open the door to more corruption in our systems. To whom and how would institutions be awarded monies it just looks like a big bright red flag to me. Will it be majority rule?

Christ himself built a hedge around His church; it was not to keep them in but to protect them from the dangers of the world around them. These walls are guidelines well basically a set of laws that He has written on our hearts. When the government leaders got involved, is when all of the disciples were persecuted and killed. He gave a specific gospel to be preached to the whole wide world, and He knew from past experience when outside influences are allowed to invade inside the church walls, changes come.

Please leave the Johnson agreement in place and please do not build a bridge Please leave our walls intact. Long before Madison and Jefferson God knew this to be the plan for true religious freedom.

Thank you for your kind consideration. Blessings!

Tammy Dresser
Port Orange, FL

From: Alicia Dellen <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Alicia Dellen
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:55:20 -0400
Importance: Normal

Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I want to thank you for your time in considering concerns that address religious liberty. I am most deeply concerned with the discussions to dismantle what our Founding Fathers considered instrumental to our freedom - The Separation of Church and State. This is addressed in the First Amendment of the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

This separation is vital to the very essence of our freedom. Our Founding Fathers were diligent students of history and understood how religion can be misused when combined with government authority. As a Christian and Seventh-day Adventist, I realize that religious leadership sought connection with the judicial to put Jesus to death. Since His death and resurrection, countless individuals have followed their conscience and sealed it with their blood.

America has been a sanctuary for those seeking the ability to worship or not worship according to the dictates of their conscience. Friends from other countries have described the horrors of governmental officials threatening its citizens with financial ruin, torture, and even death if they did not comply with religious government mandates. Please do not consider allowing this commission to be used as a stepping stone in the obliteration of the most beautiful aspect of our nation.

As a nurse and citizen of this beautiful land, I implore you to consider the comments presented by the "Pillars of Freedom," which I support.

Thank you,

Alicia Dellen

From: Filma Potter <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:55:23 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a Christian and a member of the Seventh Day Adventist church. I am very concerned about your draft report and I don't agree with it for the reasons that I've listed below.

These are the reasons I am thankful for the separation of church and state. Let's keep it that way.

1. Established churches either become instruments of oppression and terror (think Europe in the Middle Ages or Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan today) or they devolve into ceremonial entities that are little more than house-trained props for the state. These churches provide a dose of pomp at government ceremonies, but few people actually attend their services (Church of England) In recent years, established churches in some northern European nations have agreed to disestablishment as a way to reverse their decline.

2. Conservative evangelicals may not care for religious diversity, but most Americans do. This diversity, which includes thousands of distinct religions as well as varieties of nonbelief, has given us a vibrant society with a rich array of faiths and philosophies. Not only does this safeguard everyone's rights, but it also makes for a more interesting, thoughtful

3. Separation of church and states protects our right to the way we want to. Because the government doesn't presume to meddle in our religious choices, Americans have the right to align with existing houses of worship, fashion their own belief systems or reject religion entirely. You can explore, you can blend traditions – and you're always free to change your mind. Your journey may take you to a place that is unique to you, and that's fine, too. Thomas Jefferson said it best. Asked to explain his religious beliefs, he replied, "I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know." Thanks to separation of church and state, millions of Americans are taking that spirit and running with it.

4. *Separation of church and state crushes the lies of Christian nationalism:*Christian nationalism – the claim that the United States was founded to be a Christian nation

and therefore Christians (of a certain type) should have the power to infuse their theology with our laws – is a pernicious lie that is, unfortunately, embraced by millions of Americans. Separation of church and state exposes Christian nationalism for the malicious, exclusionary and ultimately empty system that it is and provides a freedom-based alternative.

I hope you will reconsider what you are trying to do. What has made this country so great is the freedom to worship who we want and the way we want to. We do not need the government to dictate anything else regarding our personal religious convictions. Even if it's a good thing, you cannot compel a person to do something against their will. The creator of the universe, the God of this world doesn't even do that he created us with free choice to do otherwise is going against God and someday you will have to answer to Him. We all will.

Sincerely,
Filma Potter

From: Shannon Fajardo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:56:32 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Committee on Religious Liberty,

Thank you for your willingness to serve on the Presidential Committee on Religious Liberty. I am grateful that this foundational American freedom is receiving thoughtful and deliberate attention.

As our nation approaches its 250th anniversary, I find myself reflecting on the profound blessings of being an American. As a practicing member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I thank God for the privilege of living in a country where I am free to worship according to the convictions of my conscience, without interference from the government. Among the many liberties we enjoy, religious freedom is the one I hold most dear.

My faith places a strong emphasis on the sacredness of freedom of conscience and the importance of learning from history. The Protestant Reformation, along with many other moments in history, reminds us that when civil authority becomes closely intertwined with religious practice, individuals often lose the freedom to follow their deeply held beliefs. These lessons have deepened my appreciation for the wisdom of our nation's founders in safeguarding religious liberty for people of all faiths—and for those who choose not to practice any faith.

While I understand that the purpose of this Committee is to strengthen religious liberty, I respectfully ask that you carefully consider the precedents your work may set for future generations. Even well-intentioned actions today can lead to unintended consequences tomorrow if government authority extends into matters of personal conscience. Freedom ceases to be genuine when it is directed, compelled, or defined by the state.

As I observe our nation today, I am concerned that we may be gradually losing sight of the principles upon which America was founded. It is my hope and prayer that our leaders will remember the courage and foresight of those who understood that faith must remain a matter of individual conviction, never one of government coercion.

My sincere prayer is that your efforts will uphold and preserve the God-given right of every American to worship freely—or not at all—according to the dictates of conscience. By remaining faithful to this principle, we honor not only our Constitution but also the enduring legacy of liberty that has made America a beacon of hope for generations.

Thank you for your service and for taking into consideration the concerns of citizens like myself.

Respectfully,

Shannon

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: Jennifer Calvelage <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Church and state seperate
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.

As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.

Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.

Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Calvelage

From: Filma Potter <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Religious liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 15:57:56 -0400
Importance: Normal

On Mon, Jul 13, 2026 at 12:55 PM Filma Potter <[redacted]> wrote:

Dear members of Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a Christian and a member of the Seventh Day Adventist church. I am very concerned about your draft report and I don't agree with it for the reasons that I've listed below.

These are the reasons I am thankful for the separation of church and state. Let's keep it that way.

1. Established churches either become instruments of oppression and terror (think Europe in the Middle Ages or Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan today) or they devolve into ceremonial entities that are little more than house-trained props for the state. These churches provide a dose of pomp at government ceremonies, but few people actually attend their services (Church of England) In recent years, established churches in some northern European nations have agreed to disestablishment as a way to reverse their decline.

2. Conservative evangelicals may not care for religious diversity, but most Americans do. This diversity, which includes thousands of distinct religions as well as varieties of nonbelief, has given us a vibrant society with a rich array of faiths and philosophies. Not only does this safeguard everyone's rights, but it also makes for a more interesting, thoughtful

3. Separation of church and states protects our right to the way we want to. Because the government doesn't presume to meddle in our religious choices, Americans have the right to align with existing houses of worship, fashion their own belief systems or reject religion entirely. You can explore, you can blend traditions – and you're always free to change your mind. Your journey may take you to a place that is unique to you, and that's fine, too. Thomas Jefferson said it best. Asked to explain his religious beliefs, he replied, "I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know." Thanks to separation of church and state, millions of Americans are taking that spirit and running with it.

4. *Separation of church and state crushes the lies of Christian nationalism:* Christian nationalism – the claim that the United States was founded to be a Christian nation and therefore Christians (of a certain type) should have the power to infuse their theology with our laws – is a pernicious lie that is, unfortunately, embraced by millions of Americans. Separation of church and state exposes Christian nationalism for the malicious, exclusionary and ultimately empty system that it is and provides a freedom-based alternative.

I hope you will reconsider what you are trying to do. What has made this country so great is the freedom to worship who we want and the way we want to. We do not need the government to dictate anything else regarding our personal religious convictions. Even if it's a good thing, you cannot compel a person to do something against their will. The creator of the universe, the God of this world doesn't even do that he created us with free choice to do otherwise is going against God and someday you will have to answer to Him. We all will.

Sincerely,
Filma Potter

From: Loraine Peart <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -ESTABLISHMENT CLAUSE -Loraine Peart
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:00:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a private citizen, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian whose faith rests on a reading history and Scripture side by side. I have come to believe that religious liberty cannot be manufactured by government; it can only be respected or violated by it. Each person must be left free to decide for themselves the convictions that will govern their conscience, and no commission, however well-intentioned, can substitute for that individual decision.

That conviction is why I oppose any law on the subject of religion, even one that seems to favor my own faith. Once government concedes that religion is a proper subject of legislation, the only question left is who controls the legislature, and majorities do not hold forever. A law favoring one form of worship today becomes a precedent for controlling it tomorrow. As one nineteenth-century witness 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. Worse, the believer who welcomes such a law traps his own future conscience: if he should ever become persuaded that some other faith is nearer the truth, he has already legislated against his own right to follow it. I would ask this Commission to weigh that risk seriously, whichever faith stands to benefit from proposed measures, because the machinery it builds will not stay in friendly hands forever.

I also believe, as every serious student of religious history eventually concludes, that force can compel outward conformity but never inward faith. Forcing people to attend church or observe a holy day may produce hypocrites, but it cannot produce Christians, because love for God cannot be legislated. This is not only a danger to the dissenter; it is a danger to the favored church itself. Fifteen centuries of established Christianity, as Madison observed, produced pride and indolence in the clergy and ignorance and servility in the laity, along with superstition and persecution. A faith that must be propped up by the state has confessed that it lacks the power to stand on its own. Even a general and president, Ulysses S. Grant, counseled leaving religion to the family altar, the church, and private support, keeping state and church forever separate. I believe our institutions today would do well to heed that same counsel rather than assume state sponsorship could revive genuine faith.

Finally, I hold that religious liberty is not a grant from the majority but a right inherent in each person before their Creator, and therefore beyond the reach of any vote. A right that depends on majority approval is not a right at all, only a permission that can be withdrawn. Government exists to protect the individual and the minority, not merely to enact the will of the many, since the majority can already look after itself at the ballot box. As one Senate witness put it, the people, however numerous, have no right to invade another person's relationship to God. Congress's own committee once affirmed that the conscience of a single dissenter is as sacred as that of the whole community. I ask this Commission to remember that popular support, however overwhelming, can never be the justification for any religious measure.

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

Respectfully,
Loraine Peart

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: Lyndon G [redacted]
To: "RLC (OASG)" [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:04:53 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

As a Seventh-Day Adventist, Christian, I believe separation of church and state has allowed God to richly bless America. Separation has been central to the religious freedom Americans enjoy — allowing faith to be voluntary, sincere, and pluralistic rather than coerced by government or a favored religious system.

Roger Williams was America's religious liberty trailblazer. He was the first to strongly espouse the separation of church and state in this Country. After fleeing severe religious persecution in Massachusetts for his beliefs, Roger Williams founded Rhode Island on the principle of separation of church and state. Eventually, all states moved to separating church and state, because it caused the states that adopted it to flourish.

The church and state model in Europe, in contrast to America's, was one where the church had both centralized religious power and significant power over state leaders. This model had serious issues leading to the "dark ages," religious intolerance, and persecution causing many to come to the United States seeking religious freedom. Why would we remove the separation that has served us so well and go back to the European model that limited religious freedom?

Roger Williams and many others, including Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Baptists, Quakers, and most Americans understood the importance of and the blessing of a complete separation of church and state. This is evidenced by Alexis de Tocqueville's (Democracy in America) statement in the 1830's about his extended visit to the United States, "I questioned the faithful of all communions…to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state."

Maybe one of the greatest things the Committee could do to positively impact religious freedom in our Country would be to label atheism and evolution as religions or religious creeds. The theory of evolution is treated in the USA as fact. The theory of evolution and atheism seem to get a disproportionate share of indoctrination in our schools and in the Country at large. The government seems to favor them over other religions as they are flying below the radar by not being declared "religions" or religious creeds. One example of this is to look at the Museum of Natural History which espouses evolution as if it is fact and does not mention other theories of origin, such as creation. Also, all public-school textbooks espouse evolution. I believe the government should not "favor" these theories/creeds as they are competing for believers in the religious space.

If the Commission seeks meaningful action to protect religious liberty, I respectfully recommend it focus on practical, constitutionally grounded steps:

- Reaffirm the government's duty of religious neutrality: neither establishing religion (let's keep government out of supporting religious organizations), nor prohibiting the free exercise of religion.
- Support clear, consistent religious-accommodation policies that respect both employees' conscience rights and legitimate employer interests.
- Declare evolution and atheism as religious creeds and cease government support of these creeds.
- Protect space for religious expression in public life without endorsing particular faiths.
- Encourage civic education that explains the constitutional basis for religious liberty, including why government neutrality best protects pluralism.

I am concerned by any push to blur the careful framework of separation of church and state which our founders created. Weakening the separation of church and state risks substituting government-preferred beliefs for the free exercise of conscience and would, I believe, erode the very religious freedom we seek to preserve.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Lyndon G PII

PII

From: Matt Winslow <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Preserve Separation of Church and State – Matt Winslow
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:05:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a public comment regarding the Commission's recommendation to clarify the proper relationship between church and state.

I appreciate the Commission's desire to protect the free exercise of religion. As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who observes the seventh-day Sabbath, I understand the importance of protecting freedom of conscience, especially for people whose religious practices differ from those of the majority.

Scripture recognizes distinct responsibilities for religious faith and civil government. Jesus said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). This distinction helps preserve both sincere faith and religious liberty.

For that reason, I respectfully oppose any clarification or reinterpretation that would weaken government neutrality toward religion, expand public funding of inherently religious activities, or further entangle churches in partisan politics through repeal of the Johnson Amendment. While religious expression should be protected, government should not promote, endorse, establish, or compel religious belief or practice.

Weakening this separation could create unintended consequences by allowing future administrations, courts, or government officials to favor certain religious beliefs over others. This could place pressure on minority faith communities, including those who observe different days of worship, as well as Americans who profess no religious faith.

History demonstrates that when civil authority becomes closely joined with religious authority, freedom of conscience is endangered. Faith is most genuine when it is accepted freely—not produced through government influence, favoritism, pressure, or coercion.

I urge the Commission to preserve the distinction between church and state while continuing to protect every person's right to exercise his or her faith. A government that remains neutral toward religion is best positioned to protect the rights of all.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

Matt Winslow

From: JEAN FORD <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re:Religious Liberty and Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:07:49 -0400
Importance: Normal

To members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
I am thankful to be an American Citizen, and a Seventh- day Adventist Christian.

The First Amendment is clear -Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion …

Jesus was clear about separation of church and state.
He said to give to Cesar what is his; and to God what is His.
History is clear:
Anytime Church and State commingle the result is oppression of people.

It is imperative to keep State and Religion separate, to promote Freedoms.
This nation was started by those fleeing the very same notion, of Church and State joining to restrict Religious Freedom of beliefs.

Thank you in advance for consideration of this crucial matter.

Sincerely,
Jean Ford

Sent from my iPhone

From: Lance Mack <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Jeannie Mack
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:08:42 -0400
Importance: Normal

The founding fathers came to this country, because they were looking for religious liberty and because they were being persecuted because the government would not let them worship to the desires of their heart. Please do not change the US Constitution. I have been a Seventh-day Adventist all my life. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jeannie Mack
Eau Claire, MI

From: Lance Hofer-Draper <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – [Lance Draper]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:09:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm writing as a citizen of the United States of America, imploring you to reconsider the suggestions made in your report, which favor utilizing government money to fund religious activities and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

By government funding of religious activities and church engagement in political events, a prevailing religion implementing force and coercion can develop. This was seen in the Dark Ages through the oppression exercised by the Roman Catholic Church. It was for freedom of religion that our forefathers came to the United States of America, and it was for that purpose that the First Amendment was developed.

My Protestant denomination, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, has also fought for religious freedom and the separation of church and state throughout U.S. history. One instance was in 1888, when Alonzo T. Jones stood for religious freedom before Senator Blair and advocated for the separation of church and state, contrary to the then-proposed Sunday Rest Bill.

In order to keep the American conscience free from coercion and oppression again, I sincerely ask that you fully enforce the Johnson Amendment and not allow government funding of religious education or clubs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Lance Draper, MD
Collinsville, Oklahoma

From: Rob Gonyea <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission Report – Rob Gonyea
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:10:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

To my friends, the members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I recognize the Commission has invested a full year of hearings, testimony, and sincere study in this report, and I do not doubt that all of you genuinely believe the founders never intended a separation of church and state. But with respect, I believe the founders' own words speak otherwise.

Thomas Jefferson, writing to the Danbury Baptists in 1802, said the First Amendment built "a wall of separation between Church & State", the very phrase the report seeks to set aside.

James Madison, Father of the Constitution, wrote in 1822: "Religion & Govt. will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together."

George Washington wrote to the Baptist churches of Virginia in 1789: "Every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience."

Benjamin Franklin wrote in 1780: "When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself... 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."

I was raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and serve today as the head elder of our local church. My church has defended the separation of church and state for nearly 150 years, not out of hostility to faith, but out of love for it.

As Ellen G. White, co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote in The Great Controversy (pp. 442–443): "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'... Only in flagrant violation of these safeguards to the nation's liberty, can any religious observance be enforced by civil authority." And she warned (p. 297): "The union of the church with the state, be the degree never so slight, while it may appear to bring the world nearer to the church, does in reality but bring the church nearer to the world."

I believe that this nation was founded on Christian principles, but America's unmatched religious vitality exists precisely because government has stayed out of the business of religion. As a father, I want my children to grow up in a nation where they serve God freely, by conscience alone and not by the direction of the state, and have the same promise of Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness afforded to all Americans since the founding of this great country.

I urge the Commission to affirm, not erode, the separation of church and state.

Respectfully,

Rob Gonyea
PropheticPrinciples.com

From: [redacted] <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - [redacted]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:14:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for allowing the general public a space to comment concerning the draft report from the Presidential Religious Liberty Committee. As a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, I am deeply concerned at the recommendations outlined in the draft report, as each recommendation seeks to build a bridge between church and state, and erode the principles embedded in the Constitution that allow US citizens the right to freedom of religion, including the right to NOT have religion. The recommendations contained in this report is, in short, a total repudiation of the First Amendment of the Constitution, and if the recommendations are accepted, this will be a fulfillment of a prophecy that this denomination has been preaching about for nearly 180 years.

If this great nation, which was founded upon the principles of freedom of conscience, to worship God or not worship God, continues along this path, and these recommendations from the religious liberty committee are implemented, IF and WHEN this "bridge" between church and state is built by our government, something the founding fathers NEVER intended to happen, the United States will continue along this path to the fulfillment of a prophecy from Revelation 13, which is, in short, the implementation of the Mark of the Beast.

I agree with the comments from Pillars of Freedom and I hope and pray that you will seriously take heed to those things which were outlined in their comments. If you ignore the appeals that have been sent opposing this draft report, and move forward with the implementation of the final erosion of our constitutionally protected freedoms, you will be found guilty before God of setting in motion the Mark of the Beast crisis, and may God have mercy on you.

Sincerely,
A Very Concerned US Citizen

From: elba peverini <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Executive Summary Recomemendations & Johnson Amendment- Elba Peverini
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:14:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a Bible-believing Seventh-day Adventist Christian and American citizen to submit my formal public comments
regarding the draft report presented on June 26. While I deeply appreciate the Commission's work to defend religious freedom,
I wish to express strong concerns and disagreement regarding Recommendation 1, Recommendation 9, and the proposals to
alter the Johnson Amendment.

Regarding Recommendation 1:
As a Seventh-day Adventist, my faith has a rich, historical heritage of advocating for a strict separation of church and state to
protect the purity of conscience. I believe that God uniquely ordained both the church and civil government with distinct jurisdictions,
a principle reflected in Luke 20:25. Altering long-standing legal interpretations of the Establishment Clause to facilitate deeper
government entanglement with religion poses a direct threat to the independence of the church. History proves that when the lines
between church and state blur, the government inevitably begins defining, regulating, and corrupting authentic faith. The neutrality
of the state is the safest shield for the church. My concern is that if the government abandons a neutral stance, the state will gain
the power to favor specific theological interpretations or denominations over others. True Christian faith must be chosen freely,
not incentivized or structurally favored by federal policies.
I treasure our historical Christian heritage, for example early American Christian leaders, like Roger Williams and the Danbury
Baptists, who fought fiercely for a "wall of separation" between church and state. They did this not to banish faith from society,
but to protect the purity of the church from the corrupting influence of state control and political manipulation.

Regarding Recommendation 9:
I disagree with the creation of a centralized Department of Justice task force dedicated to prioritizing religious litigation. Expanding
federal administrative machinery creates a dangerous precedent. Religious disputes and accommodation issues are best handled
at the local, community, and state levels rather than through a centralized Washington, D.C. apparatus, as local adjudication better
respects the organic religious fabric of distinct communities. A centralized unit designed to protect Christians today can easily
be weaponized by a future administration to target orthodox biblical values tomorrow. Our existing constitutional protections and

judicial channels are sufficient and already provide robust legal frameworks to defend believers. Adding a new bureaucratic layer
invites political favoritism and unnecessary federal expansion.

Regarding the Johnson Amendment:
I strongly opposed any efforts to repeal or weaken the Johnson Amendment. Scripture teaches that Christ's kingdom is not of this
world (John 18:36), and the church's mission must remain entirely separate from partisan politics. Allowing 501(c)(3) churches to
endorse political candidates would transform the pulpit into a tool for secular campaigns, fracturing congregations and compromising the purity of the Gospel. Furthermore, repealing this amendment invites dangerous government entanglement,
opening the door for the federal government to audit church finances and monitor sermons to enforce campaign finance laws.

Regarding Federal Overreach and Charities:
I object to recommendations that increase federal oversight into local school districts or community institutions under the guise
of religious regulation. Furthermore, I urge the commission to reject policies that deeply entangle federal funding with Christian
ministries. True religious freedom allows faith-based charities to operate independently, relying on God and the tithes of believers,
free from federal audits, oversight, and hiring restrictions.

I urge the Commission to modify these recommendations in the final report to ensure that federal overreach does not
inadvertently threaten the very religious liberties we seek to preserve.

Respectfully submitted,
Elba Peverini
McAllen, TX

From: morena abello <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment : Separation of church and state - Morena
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:19:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm a Seventh-day Adventist and agree with Pillar Of Freedom's comments.
We believe in Religious Liberty for you, and for everyone!

Please keep church and state separate. That's how we keep both of them free.

Respectfully,
Morena

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: James Kendrick <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:21:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

To: The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Dear Sir or Madam,

I write as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and an American citizen who deeply values both religious liberty and the constitutional principles that have protected it for generations. I respectfully express my concern regarding the recent conclusion of the Religious Liberty Commission suggesting that there is no true or absolute separation between church and state.

I believe this conclusion deserves careful reconsideration. The distinction between the authority of civil government and the authority of the church is not only consistent with Scripture, but is also supported by history and reflected in the constitutional framework that has safeguarded religious liberty in the United States for more than two centuries.

First, Scripture establishes distinct spheres of authority. Jesus 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-given responsibility to preserve justice, protect its citizens, and maintain civil order. The church is called to proclaim the gospel and nurture the spiritual life of believers. While Christians should faithfully influence society through their convictions and service, matters of worship and conscience belong to God alone and cannot rightly be compelled by civil authority.

Second, history consistently demonstrates the wisdom of maintaining this distinction. Whenever civil power has been used to advance or enforce religion, both the church and the state have suffered. The medieval union of church and state, the persecution that followed the Protestant Reformation, and the experiences that led many early settlers to seek religious freedom in America all remind us that genuine faith cannot be produced through governmental authority. Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island and one of America's earliest champions of religious liberty, argued for a "hedge or wall of separation" between the church and the civil government—not to exclude faith from public life, but to protect the purity of the church from political influence and to preserve liberty of conscience for every individual. Religious liberty flourishes when faith is freely chosen rather than legally compelled.

Third, the American constitutional system reflects these lessons. The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and prohibits the establishment of religion by the federal government. This principle was never intended to remove faith

from public life. Rather, it protects every citizen's freedom to live according to conscience while preventing government from favoring one religion or compelling religious observance. The Declaration of Independence likewise recognizes that our unalienable rights are endowed by our Creator, affirming that government exists to secure God-given rights rather than grant them. Together, these founding principles have served as one of the greatest safeguards of both religious liberty and civil peace.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe this issue carries particular significance. From our earliest history, our church has defended liberty of conscience for people of every faith and for those of no faith at all. Our pioneers opposed any use of civil power to compel religious observance, not merely because of historical experience, but because they understood from Scripture that worship acceptable to God must always be voluntary. Seventh-day Adventists have also long understood the prophetic warnings concerning the misuse of civil authority in matters of worship. While those beliefs are uniquely ours, they have strengthened—not weakened—our commitment to defend the religious liberty of every person, regardless of creed. This commitment has long distinguished the Seventh-day Adventist Church and remains one of its most important contributions to both religious and civic life.

Protecting the distinction between church and state does not diminish the role of faith in society. On the contrary, it allows religion to flourish without political coercion and enables government to protect the rights of all citizens equally. People of faith should continue to participate fully in public life, bringing their moral convictions to civic discussion. Yet government must never assume authority over conscience, nor should religious institutions rely upon the coercive power of the state to accomplish spiritual ends.

I respectfully urge your office to continue upholding the historic principles of religious liberty and freedom of conscience that have served our nation so well. Preserving a clear distinction between civil authority and religious authority protects not only constitutional freedoms, but also the integrity of faith itself.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

James Kendrick

From: Robert <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] RE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:23:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

I, Robert Walker, Fully support the statement below from "Advent Messenger" regarding the recommendations of Religious Liberty Commission.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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,

- Robert Walker
  Member of the
  Seventh-Day Adventist Church

References:

[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: Dawn <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment-Separation of Church and State- Trudie Temple-Walker
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:25:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I find it concerning to see that the wall of separation between church and state is being removed. I personally do not want my church or any other to be swayed to preach anything else but the gospel, however, if the church is in financial difficulty and the government has a message they wanted to have distributed and offer money in the amount of money the church needs, I can see a conflict of interest, as the church begins to change from christ centered to political centered messsages all because of political donations. I believe the Johnson amendment kept this from happening thus keeping the churches non-political. I strongly believe it should stay that way. I also believe in freedom of religion and I fear as the sparation of church and state is removed, it opens the door for religious and political persecution, as happened in the Middle Ages, especially when other political parties are in charge. This seems like a really bad idea as history always repeats itself. People fled Europe to get away from religious and political persecution to this country and it was set up on protect against that very thing. I am a Seventh Day Adventist and believe the bible has warned of this very thing. Even Jesus showed the separation when he said, "give unto Caesar the things that are Caesars and unto God the things that are God's". I also have the read the comment made by Pillar of Freedom and agree with his comments and pray you impliment them.

Trudie Dawn Temple-Walker

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Linda L. Schrader
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:26:13 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a citizen of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who loves our country, thank you for the good work that you have done to protect freedoms here in our land. However, **removing the wall of separation between church and state will open the door to loss of freedoms and political manipulations**. It will lead to **restrictions of freedom to worship** according to our own convictions based on our own Biblical understanding.

> For example, **the seventh-day Sabbath was given at creation**, Genesis 2:3: *Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.* All Ten Commandments were given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai three months after the Exodus from Egypt. This was given before there were any Jews as some people think the Sabbath was only for Jews.
>
> **Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 state all ten Commandments**, but most people only keep nine of the ten disregarding the day that God sanctified. And these commandments were repeated and lived out by Jesus and the apostles and disciples of all generations. **After Jesus was resurrected, the disciples continued to worship on the seventh-day Sabbath as was the custom of Jesus.**
>
> **The horrors of persecution**—the Roman persecution, the Dark Ages, and even today in other countries—have been and are evident **when church has power to influence and direct governments**.
>
> The Pilgrims escaped persecution in England to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony. But, again, laws were set up that all had to worship according to the state interpretation. **Roger Williams, founder of the state of Rhode Island, fled for his life from Massachusetts**. Rhode Island and other states allowed the right to worship according to each persons convictions or not to worship at all.

It's been said that the Constitution does not include a wall of separation between Church and State. However, when Thomas Jefferson as President wrote this, he was referencing the **First Amendment of the Constitution in the Bill of Rights: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;"*** His intent was that the federal government should neither establish a national religion nor interfere with people's religious beliefs and practices.

In addition to the great mistake of reinterpreting the **"separation of church and state" which IS in the Constitution because the Bill of Rights is part of the Constitution**, **repealing the Johnson Amendment would open the door to politicizing in the House of God where God's Word and freedom of thought should be preserved**. Politicking could lead to candidate favors and pressures upon church members that are inappropriate.

Also, the **religious liberty complaint system** could bring all kinds of allegations that would be unfounded and untrue! Look what has happened in England! This would result in the end of freedom of speech as well! Could Biblical principles become outlawed?

Please do NOT allow:

- **Reinterpretation of "the separation of church and state."**
- **Allowing the Johnson Act to be repealed.**
- **Creating a religious liberty complaint system.**
- **Government funding of religious institutions, groups and activities.**

- **Special treatment of Jewish people and the state of Israel for complete neutrality in our government's relationship with religion.**

Thank you for your hard work to keep the United States of America as the land of the free and the home of the brave. **May God bless your efforts to strengthen our country as a truly free nation under God**.

Sincerely,

Linda L. Schrader

From: Elijah Ramos <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:27:25 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

My name is Elijah Ramos, I live in Albuquerque, NM. I am a thirty year old, father, husband, Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, and a proud American citizen. Additionally, I have had the honor and privilege to serve as a traveling Evangelist for nearly five years, spreading the gospel message across the United States.

I am writing to express my concern regarding some of the ideas and initiatives in the report drafted by the Religious Liberty Commission to the President of the United States.

It is my wholehearted belief that the Establishment clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States is perfectly and completely sufficient to prove that the founders intended to create a nation with a strict and clear separation between the realm of the church and the realm of the state government from mixing together. This purpose was formulated, at least in part, in response to the religious persecution that such mixing caused in Europe and, subsequently created, what is now protestant Christianity. This persecution will always remain the sure result of a church entity that has the power and authority of the state to enforce its teachings. Especially in this world of sin and imperfect people and when not administered by a perfect, loving and benevolent Creator. Now, that is not to say that secularism or atheism as a religion, should either be endorsed by this nation or that the U.S. has to deny its Christian roots and origins. It is precisely because this is a Christian nation that it has the moral obligation before God and the world to protect the right and biblical principle of freedom of worship for its citizens. To do otherwise would only serve to create a nation of hypocrites which is not the type of moral citizen we should want as a country or person God wants as a representative of Christianity. The principle of freedom is what made this nation so great to begin with and also a refuge for all peoples in all places to come and find sanctuary. It's in denying this principle of freedom by violating the Establishment clause that we lose more of our "Christian-ness" than we would otherwise. A nation truly built upon the principles of Christianity should recognize the boundaries that such an institution is subject to under the authority of God's word and should instead serve to promote and facilitate the freedom and resources for its citizens to exercise their worship according to the dictates of their conscience. As the great Roger Williams expressed, the government should create and enforce laws governing the conducts of its citizens only in respect to the last six commandments of the Holy Decalogue found in Exodus chapter 20 relating to our conduct between one another and not regarding the first four commandments regulating our relationship to the Creator.

In light of this, I express the following:

1. I object to our government funding religious non-profit activities.
2. I object to our government funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses.
3. I object to our government 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, purely on the basis of their religious position.
6. I desire complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion.
7. I agree with Pillar of Freedom's comments and believe that they should be implemented.

It is because of these reasons, that ultimately, I feel that in the ideas and initiatives suggested in the drafted report of the Religious Liberty Commission, this entity is acting contrary to its very purpose for existing.

I am greatly appreciative to live in a country that values the freedom and sentiments of its people. Thank you for taking the time to read this comment.
May God bless America

Elijah J Ramos

From: Kaelan Brandenburg <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty and the Separation of Church and State – Kaelan Brandenburg
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:30:21 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: PUBLIC_COMMENT_-_Religious_Liberty_and_the_Separation_of_Church_and_State_-_Kaelan_Brandenburg.pdf

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Please find my public comment attached as a PDF. For convenience, I have also included the full text below.

Religious liberty is very dear to me. First, I want to make something clear. When I say "separation of church and state," I do not mean that the government should be a godless court of atheistic secularism. When I say "separation of church and state," I mean that the state should make no law of religion or religious observance. What is between God and man is not to be forced or interfered with by the state. Our legislatures can and should make decisions in a God-fearing manner, upholding godly principles; however, the state should never make a law in regard to a person's conscience and his worship of God.

The church and the state need to remain separate. The state should not rule over the church, nor should the church rule over the state. God has given us government in this sinful world to enforce civil matters and to punish wrongdoing, but not to force people to worship. God ordained both the church and civil government, but He gave each a distinct sphere of authority. Civil government exists to preserve order, administer justice, and punish wrongdoing:

Romans 13:1-4:
"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

1 Peter 2:13-14:
"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."

It was never given authority to compel worship or dictate matters of conscience. Genuine worship cannot be produced by force; it must be the free response of a heart surrendered to God.

Jesus Himself recognized this distinction.

Matthew 22:19-21:
"Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he 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."

By distinguishing what belongs to Caesar from what belongs to God, Christ established that civil government and God's authority are not the same. Caesar may rightfully collect taxes and enforce civil law, but worship, conscience, and obedience to God belong to God alone. We also see this in how the Ten Commandments are divided between two tables of stone. The first table contains the first four Commandments that are directly between man and God. The second table contains the last six Commandments, which govern our relationship with our fellow man. Whenever the state attempts to control worship, or the church uses the power of the state to enforce religious practice, both institutions exceed the authority God has given them. History shows us that such unions have repeatedly resulted in the suppression of conscience and the persecution of those who sought to obey God's Word above human authority.

Acts 5:29:
"We ought to obey God rather than men."

The Bible shows how the Christian faith is to be spread, and it is not by earthly governments making religious laws.

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 to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

Luke 9:54-56:
“And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”

2 Corinthians 10:3-5:
“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”

In the Bible there are prophecies that speak of a religious system that would gain power over the state and compel people to worship according to its dictates. We can see this in history in the Roman Papacy. When this religious entity was united with the state and exercised civil power, enforcing practices that are contrary to Scripture and striving to change the law of God itself, this resulted in the persecution, imprisonment, torture, and death of countless Christians who sought to uphold the Bible according to their conscience. Examples include the various inquisitions and the martyrdom of John Huss, along with many others.

The Bible describes this power in Revelation 17 as a woman, which represents a church in Bible prophecy, riding a beast, which represents state and civil power. This system was drunken with the blood of the saints and is called "Mystery Babylon." If the Protestant churches of America unite with the state to enforce religion upon the people, including a day of rest that the Bible does not support but was changed by the Roman Papacy and serves as a mark of its authority (sacred worship and rest on Sunday instead of on the Sabbath of the Lord our God), then those Protestant churches will be fully uniting with Babylon and making an image to the beast (the image being the church state union, just like Papal Rome in the time of the Dark Ages or 1260 years/ 42 months/ time times and a half, see Revelation 13). National ruin will follow as this system comes into

judgment and is destroyed by God, as foretold in Revelation 17, 18, and 19. The Great Controversy by Ellen G. White also discusses this, particularly in chapter 35.

This committee's assertion that the separation of church and state is a "lie" and its recommendation to replace that historic distinction with a "bridge" between church and state opens the door for the legislation of religion upon the people. While cooperation between religious citizens and civil government in matters of public morality is appropriate, the state must never be given authority over matters of worship and conscience. This is dangerous, and the violation of liberty of conscience is an abomination to God. The gospel is to be preached to all nations as a witness; then humanity will have the free right to choose whether to accept the gift of God or not, and then the end shall come. The Bible never instructs the church to enforce its principles through the state. If the Protestant churches of America upheld the full and complete gospel—that the righteousness of Christ not only covers our record of sin and iniquity and makes us right with God but also imparts power to transform the life, to "go, and sin no more," to have Christ's life, His righteousness, living within us, which then brings forth the fruit of total obedience to His moral law (which defines sin, so obedience to this law is to not sin, righteousness) by His power and Spirit living in us “both to will and to do his good pleasure” Philippians 2:13 (His true seventh-day Sabbath is part of this law)—then there would not be this condition of godlessness and atheism in our country.

To close, I am concerned about the door that the decision of this committee has opened. The state making religious laws, or the church enforcing religious laws through the state will not bring glory to God and will only result in suffering, abominations, and ruin. Upholding civil and religious liberty has been the secret of this nation's strength and power. I pray that you will not change this and erode the very fabric of our nation.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and a citizen of the United States of America. I love this nation and the freedom it upholds. This letter sets forth my position. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God.

Sincerely,
Kaelan Brandenburg

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.”

Letter to the U.S.A. Presidential Religious Liberty Commission

Religious liberty is very dear to me. First, I want to make something clear. When I say "separation of church and state," I do not mean that the government should be a godless court of atheistic secularism. When I say "separation of church and state," I mean that the state should make no law of religion or religious observance. What is between God and man is not to be forced or interfered with by the state. Our legislatures can and should make decisions in a God-fearing manner, upholding godly principles; however, the state should never make a law in regard to a person's conscience and his worship of God.

The church and the state need to remain separate. The state should not rule over the church, nor should the church rule over the state. God has given us government in this sinful world to enforce civil matters and to punish wrongdoing, but not to force people to worship. God ordained both the church and civil government, but He gave each a distinct sphere of authority. Civil government exists to preserve order, administer justice, and punish wrongdoing:

Romans 13:1-4:
"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil."

1 Peter 2:13-14:
"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well."

It was never given authority to compel worship or dictate matters of conscience. Genuine worship cannot be produced by force; it must be the free response of a heart surrendered to God.

Jesus Himself recognized this distinction.

Matthew 22:19-21:
"Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he 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."

By distinguishing what belongs to Caesar from what belongs to God, Christ established that civil government and God's authority are not the same. Caesar may rightfully collect taxes and enforce civil law, but worship, conscience, and obedience to God belong to God alone. We also see this in how the Ten Commandments are divided between two tables of stone. The first

table contains the first four Commandments that are directly between man and God. The second table contains the last six Commandments, which govern our relationship with our fellow man. Whenever the state attempts to control worship, or the church uses the power of the state to enforce religious practice, both institutions exceed the authority God has given them. History shows us that such unions have repeatedly resulted in the suppression of conscience and the persecution of those who sought to obey God's Word above human authority.

Acts 5:29:
"We ought to obey God rather than men."

The Bible shows how the Christian faith is to be spread, and it is not by earthly governments making religious laws.

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 to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.”

Luke 9:54-56:
“And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”

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then those Protestant churches will be fully uniting with Babylon and making an image to the beast (the image being the church state union, just like Papal Rome in the time of the Dark Ages or 1260 years/ 42 months/ time times and a half, see Revelation 13). National ruin will follow as this system comes into judgment and is destroyed by God, as foretold in Revelation 17, 18, and 19. The Great Controversy by Ellen G. White also discusses this, particularly in chapter 35.

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I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and a citizen of the United States of America. I love this nation and the freedom it upholds. This letter sets forth my position. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God.

Sincerely,
Kaelan Brandenburg

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.”

From: Mario n Anna Sedillo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Mario Sedillo
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:32:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

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:

It has come to my attention recently of your intent to "build a bridge" between Church & State. I just want to use this opportunity to express my opposition to this stance.

Although the US Constitution never uses the phrase "separation of church and state," the concept is easily recognizable. Our great nation was founded on such principles. It was the persecution of religious liberty that led our founders to flee from Europe in the first place. Our most prominent authors of our Constitution and Bill of Rights also expressly acknowledged how this was not good for our country. One only has to look into quotes from our nation's pioneers such as Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson, to name a few. Some quotes are as follows:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter that lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith, or his worship, that the legitimate powers of govt. 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." Thomas Jefferson

"Religion or the duty that we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence." James Madison (whom I might add is widely considered the Father of the Constitution)

"Religion and government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together." James Madison

Additionally, one only needs to look at Article VI of our Constitution which states in part that "....no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States of America." This combined with the more familiar 1st Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in **1791**, prohibits the government from making laws that respect an establishment of religion, prohibit the free exercise of religion, abridge freedom of speech or of the press, or interfere with the right to peaceably assemble and petition for redress of grievances.

Some have used this false narrative that there is no distinction to separate the idea of Church/State in support of "Blue Laws" which are still in the books in some states. For example in my State of New

Mexico, it was forbidden to sell alcohol on Sundays for many years.

A well known author, whom Smithsonian Magazine named as being among "The 100 Most Significant Americans of All Time" Ellen G. White, in her popular book entitled "The Great Controversy" explains the history of how a "bridge between a Church and State Union" should never be, nor have any part in our laws and/or government, better than I ever could. If you have never read it, I highly encourage you to do so. She details how during "The Dark Ages" for example, how a union such as this can eventually lead to persecution, and even death.

As a matter of fact, biblically, in the prophetic book of Revelation, specifically Chapter 13, it also brings this to light. One day, a beast power (our very own United States of America) will cause all of the world to Worship the first beast who had a deadly wound that was healed, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. This power will *cause all* those to worship the beast or be killed.

As a matter of fact, the Native Americans, of whom I have many ancestors, were also forced to endure this atrocity as well. They were forced to accept and adhere to the Spanish Colonists attempts to indoctrinate the Native Americans to their religious practices. In my great State of New Mexico, this resulted in "The Pueblo Revolt of 1680" in which 400 Spaniards and over 2000 settlers were driven out of the province.

As a good standing board member of my local 120+ member Seventh-day Adventist Church's Religious Liberty group, I can assure you that most, if not all, are opposed to this "bridge" that is being recommended in this report.

I do respectfully urge you, as our fellow US Citizens, to not "bridge the gap" between Church and State, and deny their current view and recommendation altogether.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely, A concerned American Citizen,
Mario Sedillo
Albuquerque, New Mexico

From: Hodge Podge Life <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Letter of Concern
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:34:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

A letter from my father, he asked me to forward this for him. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **carroll graybeal** <[redacted]>
Date: Mon, Jul 13, 2026, 10:04 AM
Subject: Letter of Concern
To: Angie Graybeal <[redacted]>

To Whom it May Concern,
As a retired Seventh-day Adventist lay pastor and concerned student of the Bible, I find the Trump-appointed Religious Liberty Commission's attempt to replace the wall of separation between church and state concept, with a new framework, one that builds bridges between government and religious institutions, a serious cause for alarm.
History has repeatedly shown that mixing church and state is dangerous inasmuch as it always leads to persecution, as our forefathers who fled England seeking religious freedom, could testify. So also, could the millions of martyrs during the dark ages who were slain by the dominant religious organization, Catholicism, working in union with the French Government. Millions were martyred simply because they rejected the church's teachings and dogmas.
A movement toward building bridges between church and state may appear small and innocent at first, but once the flood gates are opened it, the likelihood is, it will become impossible to control. Thank you for considering my concerns. Carroll Graybeal.

From: Julie Glass <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Julie Nutchoo
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:37:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe strongly in Religious Liberty. I believe this is exactly what Jesus came to bring to every man and woman born on earth: freedom to choose (Deut. 30:19; Galatians 5:1). I appreciate the stated conviction of this Commission: "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength. It protects believers and nonbelievers alike. It strengthens communities, enriches civic life, and lifts up individuals from every background, color, and creed."

I have reviewed the main points of the Commission's report to the DOJ. Although some aspects of the report mention religious liberty for all, I do see a broad concern with statements about "building bridges between church and state." I am grateful for people like Roger Williams who, in the early 1600's, was banished from the Massachusett's Bay Colony in a large part because of his teaching that the civil authorities had no right to interfere in religious matters. In a letter to Pastor John Cotton in 1644 (*The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience Discussed and Mr. Cotton's Letter Examined and Answered),* Williams alludes to Isaiah 5 in writing the following. "When they (the church) opened a gap in the hedge, or wall of separation, between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world, God always broke down the wall, removed the candlestick, and made His garden a wilderness, as at this day. If God is ever pleased to restore His garden and paradise again, it must of necessity be peculiarly walled in from the world unto Himself"(Parentheses supplied). William's taught that in order to keep the faith of the church pure, it needed to be completely separate from the civil government. I agree with this.

Please consider the truth of this quote by one of our founding fathers, James Madison:

"And I have no doubt that every new example will succeed, as every past one has done, in showing that religion and Government will both exist in greater purity the less they are mixed together."

My simple request is that, for the sake of purity in Jesus' precious church, the civil government would stay separate from the church. I am not in favor of any "bridge" between church and state.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Julie Nutchoo

From: Nalan Francis <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious LIberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:38:37 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who takes both halves of the First Amendment's religion clauses seriously, and I ask you to consider an argument that is not secular at all, but Christian. Christ himself told his questioners to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's, drawing a line between two jurisdictions that no earthly power may erase. Civil government exists to secure the duties we owe one another; it has no authority over the duties we owe God. That means the state's only legitimate question about any act is whether it is civil or uncivil, whether it invades a neighbor's rights, never whether it is religious, irreligious, or heretical. Morality belongs to God; civility belongs to the state. Any recommendation that puts government behind a religious text, symbol, or practice crosses a boundary that Christ himself drew, and does so in the name of a faith that forbids the crossing.

History shows why that line cannot be blurred a little without eventually being erased altogether. The first Sunday law came from Constantine in A.D. 321, while he still held the pagan title of Pontifex Maximus, and it opened a door that ambitious clergy and an ambitious state walked through together. Imperial favor filled the churches with converts seeking advantage rather than truth; the state, once enlisted to settle religious disputes, became a partisan in them; and a partisan state loses the very peacekeeping power that justifies its existence. Augustine supplied a theology of righteous compulsion, and the Inquisition supplied its practice. No one at the first step intends the last step, but the last step is contained in the first, because the first step concedes the principle that government may enforce religious duty. Everything after that is only application.

And this is not a foreign story. American majorities have run this experiment themselves, in full sincerity, and produced real victims. The judges of Salem were devout and learned, yet they did wanton violence to the plainest principles of morality while believing they served God. Two centuries later, in 1892, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers, one sixty-two years old, and marched them through the streets of Paris, Tennessee, in a chain gang for quietly plowing their own fields on Sunday after resting on Saturday, while trainloads of workmen passed the jail every Sunday undisturbed. Sincerity did not protect those men, and it will not protect anyone once the machinery of religious enforcement exists and passes into other hands. As one Baptist bulletin warned at the time, we should be careful how we let in the camel's nose of religious legislation, lest the brute crowd his bulky form in and occupy the whole shop.

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

Respectfully,
N. Francis

From: Jeanette Joham <jeanette4oakhaven@gmail.com>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:39:03 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist.

The Pilgrims suffered religious persecution in the Old World and came to America to get away from it. The United States has been the welcoming agent for people suffering from religious persecution for many years, and it has been a good thing!

Roger Williams would have greatly benefited from the separation of church and state and was one of the first to put forth the idea. William Penn devoted his land to religious freedom, and didn't Thomas Jefferson try to put the Baptists at ease about their religious beliefs?

I believe that the "wall" between church and state has served the citizens of the United States very well. Please do not build a "bridge" between the two now. Wherever the church has received power from the state, persecution has broken out.

Let us keep the separation between the church and the state going in the United States! Please never let it go!

Sincerely,
Jeanette Joham
Attalla, Alabama

From: Marilyn Francis <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:40:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen who cares deeply about religious liberty, precisely because I have watched what happens when sincere, well-meaning majorities decide they know best what religion the state should favor. History does not treat that experiment kindly. The judges of Salem were devout and learned men, yet they stand condemned for the wanton violence they did to the plainest principles of morality. Two centuries later, in 1892, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers for quietly plowing their own fields on a Sunday, marching them through the streets of Paris, Tennessee, in a chain gang, while, as one of the jailed men noted, trainloads of workmen passed the jail every Sunday without disturbing anyone. The selectivity is the tell. It was never really about rest or reverence; it was about whose conscience would be allowed to stand and whose would be made an example. As one old church bulletin warned, we must be careful how we let in the camel's nose of religious legislation, lest the brute crowd his bulky form in and occupy the whole shop. The intentions of Salem's judges and Tennessee's juries were sincere. That is exactly why intentions cannot be the safeguard. The question is what the machinery does once built, and who inherits the controls.

That is why I ask the Commission to remember where our rights actually come from. If a majority vote can grant religious liberty, a majority vote can take it away, and then it was never a right at all, only a permission. Our tradition holds otherwise: a right is inherent in the one possessing it, independent of the will of all other persons, because man's first allegiance is to his Creator, and that domain is one no human government has the right to invade. Popular government exists to protect the minority, not to overrule it, since the majority can already take care of itself at the ballot box. As Jones told a Senate committee considering Sunday legislation, the people, however numerous, have no right to invade your relationship to God, nor mine. Even Congress once affirmed this: a committee report from 1829 declared that the Constitution regards the conscience of the Jew as sacred as that of the Christian. Popularity may justify a highway bill. It cannot justify a religious one.

Finally, I would ask the Commission to weigh why these episodes never stop at a first, modest step. Constantine's first Sunday law in A.D. 321 seemed a small concession, yet it placed the civil power in service of the church, and the church came to compel those outside it to act as though they belonged. The government that takes sides in religious controversy loses the very thing it exists to provide: the civil power, by becoming a party to religious controversy, had lost the power to prevent civil violence between religious factions. This is not because each step intends the next, but because, as Jones put it, if the first step be taken, the last step is then as certainly taken, for the last step is in the first. No one on this Commission proposes an Inquisition. No one ever does at the first step. I ask only that you refuse the underlying principle that government may define and promote religious duty, so that the consequences contained in that principle never have the chance to arrive.

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

Respectfully,
Marilyn

2 Timothy 2:15

From: Lady S <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Nesline Smith
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:40:44 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greetings Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

It is with great humility and much prayer that I write this letter to you. I would like to preface that I have been a Christian for more than 30 years. After much research and prayer, I was convicted to become a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian in 2000. Prior to 2000, I was a proponent for the unity of church and state. At the time, I believed that there was no harm for the government to fund religious non-profit activities, reinstatement of prayers in school, and churches that support political activities. However, today, as a mature fundamental Bible believing Christian, I believe otherwise.

To be a Christian, simply means to be a follower of Jesus the Christ. Although Christ is omnipotent, He does not force us to follow Him. He gives us free will. As much as Jesus would like for all men to be saved, only a few will be saved as these few have made the choice to follow Him completely. Thus, to lead with the example of Christ means for us to not impose our views on people, but to give them the freedom to choose.

Next, as a nation, we must not forget our history. The Puritans fled from Europe because of the harsh consequences of the union of church and state. History firmly teaches us that the union of church and state leads to persecution and death.

Therefore, I am humbly requesting for you to:

-not fund religious non-profit activities (as this will pave room for preferential religious funding)

-not repeal the Johnson Amendment (as house of worships will become politicized)

Thank you for your time and consideration for this very urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Nesline Smith

Miami, Florida

From: Seventhday <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Objection to the RLC
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:40:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.

As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.

Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.

Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate you

From: Greg Collins <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Protect Religious Freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:41:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am writing to express my support for religious freedom. As a Seventh Day Adventist, we have long been warned about the dangers of and the long and sad history of combining church and state. While I do believe we christians ought to have more influence in the governing of the country, it should not be by mandate and force. The constitution's 1st amendment phrases it as prohibiting the government from making any law "respecting an establishment of religion." This does not mean to eliminate religion. The concept of "separation of church and state" pushed in the last number of decades is in error to completely eliminate religion from the culture while establishing the "religions" of atheism, pseudoscience, satanism etc, to prevail.
The USA was founded upon the principle of freedom of choice - freedom to worship according to one's own conscience. To not be commanded by the government concerning a person's relationship to God. I am concerned this new trend toward "Christian Nationalism" is a swing of the pendulum too far, and will result in the government violating our freedom of religion by mandating religious practices such as Sunday keeping and Blue laws. Not only is this an erroneous tradition by the great majority of Christianity and entirely non Biblical, it would be an establishment of religion to mandate this practice.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.
Greg Collins
Verde Valley, Arizona

From: Sharon Power <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] response to Religious Liberty Committee
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:41:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Committee for Religious Liberty: My maternal grandparents emigrated to the USA seeking religious freedom and fleeing persecution from the atheistic, totalitarian USSR. My paternal grandparents were Seventh Day Adventist Christians who taught me to value our belief in freedom to worship as the Bible commands, not the strong arm of an oppressive government or even a church.

50 years ago I was taught in my high school civil government class the principles of our constitution, including the first amendment. I support the response submitted by the Pillar of Freedom Org, and hope you as a committee support our freedoms we Americans enjoy by upholding one of the most important pillars of our country founded on freedom, the separation of church and state.

Sincerely, Sharon Power

From: kathy williams <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Objection to any Recommendation for change to the Establishment Clause or the Government Remaining Neutral Toward Religion
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:44:04 -0400
Importance: Normal

Kathy Williams
[redacted]

July 13, 2026

The Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Attn: Commission Secretariat / Chairman Dan Patrick
The White House / Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.

RE: Public Comment on the Draft Report Concerning the Establishment Clause and Government Neutrality Toward Religion

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

I am writing to you as a faithful Seventh-day Adventist to offer a critical perspective on the Commission's recent evaluations concerning the Establishment Clause and the principle of the separation of church and state. I understand that the Commission's recent report questions whether the government should remain neutral toward the establishment of religion. However, I urge you to recognize that true religious liberty for all Americans cannot exist without a firm, impenetrable wall of separation between civil governance and ecclesiastical matters.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a deeply rooted, historical understanding of what happens when the state abandons its position of religious neutrality. In the late 19th century, our community faced severe state-sanctioned persecution across various U.S. states due to the enforcement of local "Sunday Blue Laws". Because Seventh-day Adventists conscientiously observe the biblical Sabbath on Saturday (the seventh day of the week), many of our pioneers were heavily fined, publicly humiliated, and even jailed simply for quietly working on their own property on Sundays.

These painful historical events demonstrate a fundamental truth: whenever the government aligns itself with, promotes, or refuses to remain neutral toward a majority religion, religious minorities invariably suffer. When civil authorities attempt to enforce religious dogma, the shield of religious liberty is transformed into a sword used to coerce the consciences of dissenting citizens.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides a brilliant, two-fold protection for our freedoms:

1. **The Free Exercise Clause** ensures that every citizen can live out and express their deeply held beliefs without federal interference.
2. **The Establishment Clause** guarantees that the government will never use its immense power to codify, endorse, or prefer any theological framework.

These two clauses are inextricably linked. The government cannot truly protect the "Free Exercise" of all its citizens if it actively abandons neutrality to favor an "Establishment" of religion.

The original intent of the separation of church and state—as famously championed by early religious liberty defenders like Roger Williams and later formalized by Thomas Jefferson—was never to banish morality or people of faith from public discourse. Rather, it was explicitly designed to keep the government's corrupting influence out of the church, and to prevent any single religious faction from using the mechanisms of the state to oppress others.

As the Commission finalizes its recommendations to President Trump, I strongly urge you to uphold the constitutional mandate of absolute government neutrality toward religion. We must fiercely protect the Constitution and preserve these foundational freedoms for every single American—regardless of whether they belong to a majority faith, a minority faith, or no faith at all.

Thank you for your time, your consideration of this historical perspective, and your service to our nation.

Sincerely,

Kathy Williams

Member, First Seventh-Day-Adventist Church

From: Sawyer <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment --Presidential Religious Liberty Commission's recommendations as they relate to Church and State Union --Sawyer D'Amico
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:44:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greetings from Southern California to the Presidential Commission of Religious Liberty,

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's Comments. Please implement them, and please uphold the implementation of the Johnson Amendment.

As a conservative, I can tell you that this is not a Red vs Blue issue, but something of a National Security issue. For to have the security and peace of the nation, it takes the continual blessings of the world's Creator and Savior whom the Founding Fathers drew inspiration from.

The Executive Summary fails to mention some of the reports central recommendations: funding religious non-profit activities, funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses, repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts church's political activities; it further supports special treatment given to Jewish people and the nation-state of Israel; I desire for the US complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion. I object to the government showing such favoritism and meddling in areas it has no business in. Has everyone forgotten opening of First Amendment "Establishment Clause" -- that congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion? The government is supposed to remain neutral in matters of faith -- that yours and my faith, or lack thereof, remain protected.

It is very clear the Commission is being counseled with a faulty report of history. Our nation can never become great again, until it first becomes righteous again. It is imperative that we consider why God shed his grace on this once humble nation and allowed it to become strengthened and empowered to what it is today.

Our nation's pilgrim fore-fathers fled Europe to seek religious freedom from the tyranny of both Popes and Kings with respect to their Church-State union. There is an excellent chapter 16 on this matter in the book, The Great Controversy by Ellen White, and it was a righteous cause to flee such a dark state of Society even to virtually unknown, far-away lands as America was to them because their current status of society under Church-State union, they recognized, will always have little-to no hope for change. Such absolute power corrupts absolutely!

It is the principles of separation of Church and State, that grant us liberty of conscience, which from there enables principles to be drawn fourth that create the possibility for ideas and rights of freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, and the right to bear arms to name a few foundational ones that the rest of our Bill of Rights are anchored upon. It all starts with separation of Church and State

With separation of Church and State, you have the right to be wrong in this country. But if you have Church-State union -- you ONLY will have the right to be right -- that is, to be correct according to the State dictates for your what is politically and/or religiously correct! This inevitably creates oppressive tyranny as seen in other lands where you see the attempt of the Muslim Caliphate across the Middle East, or in China where other religions other than their designated politically correct ones that the CCP does not feel threatened by are not welcome and must therefore worship in the underground; North Korea, which professes there is no God (rendering them Atheist?), also has its people worship their

Supreme Leader as if he is God... and this is no different than the influence of Popes and Kings in past European History having absolute, totalitarian influence upon society without checks and balances to safeguard religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Is this what we want America to devolve unto? What profit us to return to archaic, sub-par standards?

The Johnson Amendment will further politicize America's churches. This is not a good thing. Church is for the furthering of the gospel, not pushing politician's agenda's. This was seen in Nazi Germany as they forced out (or killed) all the German preachers, and replaced them with state-sponsored heralds of Nazi propaganda. Where my President may cater and pander to the Bible-belt, religious right class within middle America and the South (which there is nothing wrong with that) -- trying to take the sacred institution of the Lord's House, whose pulpit and messages are reserved for His gospel purposes , instead for mortal man's political agendas. It is beyond sacrilegious and borders on blasphemy (to make oneself equal with God -- See John 10:30-33; Matt 26:63-65).

It is my opinion that America needs the healing blessing of what the gospel can do in peoples lives, but this must be chosen at the individual level, and never forced or coerced. Jesus always bid people to follow Him and his teachings, and did not rise up in political office to enforce his beliefs. "My kingdom is not of this world" John 18:36. Christ's method, and Christ's method alone of winning hearts and minds on an individual basis as he went about and encountered people is how the gospel went out and is still to go out by Christians, and letting people choose for themselves whether they would allow Him and His teachings to be the king of their lives and hearts. You cannot force love, nor does politically rallying church congregations and pastors to spew political agendas produce genuine faith relationship in Jesus. This is a counterfeit, spurious faith that reeks of Bible prophecy's Mark of the Beast practices where there is no separation of Church and state. Whether or not you believe in Bible prophecy, funding religious, non-profit activities, and turning the government sectarian is just one step closer to losing freedom for everyone. This is not what America was built for, nor is it what has led to our blessedness over the 250 years of its history.

For these and many other reasons -- though these are reasons enough -- I object to these recommendations on the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission that will further weaken the separation of Church and State.

Thank you for time,

sincerely,

Sawyer D'Amico

PS:

My church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, has a great magazine that is free unto many who simply sign up --- Liberty Magazine -- and ought to be considered as you form your understanding of these unprecedented times we live in. Our church also has a great book that addresses from the lens of history, politics, and religion a great conflict between good and evil that culminates prophetically at the end of the world a Sunday Law Crisis that the Supreme Court and Congress shall enforce, thus repudiating the bedrock foundations that God has blessed this nation for -- separation of church and state and the corresponding liberty of conscience that follows. The book, which I already referenced above, is called the Great Controversy. For almost 200 years our church has taught that these very issues would arise, because, the Bible reveals as much in a deep study of the 2nd Beast of Revelation 13, and The Great Controversy gives further details into how this can come about. It is a must read, and is even in the Library of Congress. Aside from the Bible being #1, this just might be 2nd most important book you may ever read and you dont need to be religious to appreciate it -- especially if you work in government.

"

From: Shirley Sneddon <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Shirley Sneddon
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:45:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Religious liberty is not just a political issue to me—it is a deeply held biblical principle and an important part of my faith. My church has long believed that every person should have the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience, or to choose not to practice a religion at all, without pressure or interference from the government.

For that reason, I appreciate the Commission's desire to protect the free exercise of religion. Every American should be free to live out his or her sincerely held religious beliefs without discrimination.

However, I am concerned by recommendations that appear to weaken the historic separation of church and state. In my understanding, this separation was never intended to silence religion. Rather, it protects both the church and the government by keeping each independent of the other.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I belong to a denomination that has historically depended on these protections. Because we have often been a religious minority, we understand the importance of a government that does not favor one faith tradition over another. The same constitutional protections that safeguard my freedom today also protect the rights of my Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, Hindu, atheist, and other neighbors. Religious liberty must belong equally to everyone, or it is not truly religious liberty.

I am particularly concerned about recommendations that would encourage greater financial entanglement between government and religious organizations. Churches should remain free to preach, teach, and minister without becoming dependent on government funding or subject to future political influence. History has shown that whenever civil government and religious institutions become too closely connected, both are ultimately weakened.

I am also concerned about repealing the Johnson Amendment. While churches certainly have the right to address moral issues, I believe they should remain focused on proclaiming the gospel rather than becoming identified with political parties or election campaigns. The church's mission is eternal, while political movements are temporary.

Throughout history, many people came to America seeking freedom from governments that favored particular religions. Our nation's commitment to liberty of conscience has allowed faith to flourish without government control. I hope we will preserve that legacy for future generations.

Please continue to protect the free exercise of religion while preserving the constitutional principle that keeps both church and state independent. I believe that this balance has served our nation well and remains one of the greatest safeguards of religious freedom for people of every faith.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Shirley Sneddon

Peoria, AZ

DOJ-RLC Comment-020518

From: Brittany Davis <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Remaining Faithful to Our Historic Stand for Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:46:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am writing as a fellow Seventh-day Adventist who is deeply grateful for the work you do in defending religious liberty. It is because I value this ministry that I wish to respectfully appeal for an even clearer and more public witness regarding government involvement in matters of worship.

Our pioneers understood that liberty of conscience was not merely a constitutional principle—it was a biblical principle.

One of the greatest defenders of this truth was **Alonzo T. Jones**. His testimony before the United States Senate Committee in opposition to the Blair Sunday Rest Bill remains one of the finest defenses of religious liberty ever presented. Jones argued that civil government has authority over civil matters, but absolutely no authority over worship. Whether a law requires attendance at church, compels Sabbath or Sunday observance, or favors one religious practice above another, it exceeds the jurisdiction God has given to the state.

Jones recognized that the issue was far larger than Sunday.

The real issue was **whether civil government possesses authority to legislate conscience.**

As Seventh-day Adventists, our answer has always been no.

Scripture consistently teaches this distinction.

Christ declared,

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21)

Caesar has authority over taxes, public safety, and civil order.

He does not have authority over worship.

Romans 13 likewise teaches that civil rulers are "ministers of God" to restrain evil and protect society—not to determine how, when, or whom people worship.

This principle becomes even more significant in light of Bible prophecy.

Revelation 13 portrays a final conflict centered upon worship. It describes civil powers enforcing religious requirements and compelling allegiance in matters that belong to God alone. While we should exercise great care not to declare every religiously influenced law a fulfillment of prophecy, we should be equally careful not to overlook the biblical principle involved whenever government enters the realm of worship.

Ellen White repeatedly warned that even well-intentioned religious legislation places the state where God never intended it to stand. She wrote:

"The union of the church with the state, be the degree ever so slight, while it may appear to bring the world nearer to the church, does in reality bring the church nearer to the world."

(*The Great Controversy*, p. 297)

She also wrote:

"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)

These statements capture the historic Adventist understanding perfectly.

Government exists to protect the free exercise of religion.

It does not exist to encourage, require, or enforce acts of worship.

I have become concerned that, in today's cultural and political climate, many Christians—including some within our own fellowship—appear increasingly comfortable with the idea of government promoting religious observance if it aligns with biblical values. While the motives may be sincere, history teaches that whenever civil power is used to advance religious objectives, liberty of conscience is inevitably diminished.

This was precisely the concern of Alonzo T. Jones.

It was the concern of Ellen White.

It has been the concern of Seventh-day Adventists since our beginning.

For this reason, I respectfully encourage the Religious Liberty Commission to continue proclaiming, with clarity and conviction, that the state must never compel or privilege worship through legislation. Whether such laws concern Sunday observance or any other religious practice, our position should remain consistent because it is rooted in Scripture, not circumstance.

Our church has long defended the rights of all people—Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, and those of every other faith—to worship according to conscience or not to worship at all. This witness reflects the character of Christ, who never forced allegiance but always invited it.

I pray that our church will continue to be known as the strongest voice for liberty of conscience in the Christian world, faithfully carrying forward the legacy of Alonzo T. Jones, E. J. Waggoner, and the pioneers who understood that genuine worship cannot be legislated.

I would encourage the Religious Liberty Commission to consider republishing, teaching, and publicly highlighting Alonzo T. Jones's testimony against the Blair Sunday Bill. His defense of liberty of conscience is remarkably relevant today and would help remind both our members and the broader public that Seventh-day Adventists oppose government-enforced worship not merely because of prophecy, but because Scripture teaches that conscience belongs to God alone.

May God continue to bless your ministry with wisdom, courage, and faithfulness.

In Christian fellowship,

Brittany Davis

From: Nicholas Smeragulio <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] History repeats itself when its repeatedly ignored
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:47:44 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a citizen of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. Along with millions of fellow Seventh-day Adventists around the world, I firmly believe in the God-given right of freedom of conscience and in the vital principle of the separation of church and state.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution declares:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

As a former Catholic, I have come to appreciate the importance of protecting both religious liberty and freedom of conscience for people of every faith. History repeatedly demonstrates that whenever religious institutions gain the power of the state—or the state exercises authority over religion—the results are corruption, coercion, and persecution.

Jesus Christ Himself taught this principle when He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Christ recognized that civil government and the kingdom of God have distinct roles. As Christians, we trust His wisdom. Likewise, the founders of our nation recognized this truth by enshrining religious liberty and prohibiting the establishment of religion in the First Amendment.

Weakening this constitutional safeguard—whether by using government funds to support religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it risks politicizing religion, encouraging houses of worship to seek government favor, and placing them under political influence rather than God's authority.

History is clear: when church and state unite, both suffer. From the persecutions of the Middle Ages to other examples throughout history, the blending of religious and civil power has too often resulted in the suppression of conscience and the loss of liberty.

I respectfully urge you to protect the integrity of both faith and our constitutional republic by preserving the wall of separation between church and state. Doing so safeguards the religious freedom of every American and ensures that faith remains a matter of conviction rather than government influence.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Nick

From: Christian Giuliano <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separate church and state.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:47:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.
As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."
It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.
Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.
Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter.
Sincerely,

From: Karen Mer <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Johnson Amendment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:50:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I hope this letter will help foster your concern for religious liberty in this country. I am a Christian and attend a Seventh Day Adventist Church. I believe I may be speaking for others of no religious belief, or those who represent or participate in religious practices other than those that are Christian. Freedom for one is freedom for all. I believe you are going about your duties in a way that is counter productive to your intended goal which I believe is sincere, but misguided.

Government has the responsibility to protect our religious liberty but it cannot give it to us. Therefore, it cannot take it away. The course you are pursuing will surely erode it, not protect it. Any bridge will create an interdependence that will surely erode freedom in one area, while giving it to another. Civil authorities need to remain separate from religious authorities.

According to the Declaration of Independence “we hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal. Our inalienable rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our humaness, our very personhood alone gives us those rights. This document acknowledges those rights as given by our creator whatever, however we understand the word creator.
The very foundation of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness must rest in freedom of conscience.

YOu want to build a bridge to protect freedom of speech, but what happened to Carrie Prejean, one of your own members when she expressed her position on accountability and government neutrality? The civil government your own commission found her guilty of perceived bias.

What happened to the Finnish parliamentarian who wrote a booklet stating her views on marriage? She is now accused of hate crimes and crimes against humanity by Finland’s highest court.

I understand there is no specific clause of separation of church and state in our Constitution, but it is implied in principle in that it does states our government cannot establish a state religion. The freedoms we enjoy today are rendered because we have not violated that principle. I realize it is not your intent to do so, but the bridge you intend to build will surely act as such. One has only to look across the globe and see the persecution of people whose freedom of speech is being violated.

I urge you to retain the Johnson Amendment that will help preserve the integrity of religious institutions and protect the independence of the civil government. Our history bears witness to the efficacy of separation of church and state.

Thank you for your careful attention to this matter.

From: Tania Giuliano <tani72@hotmail.com>
To: "RLC@usdoj.gov" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:51:58 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,
We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.
As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."
It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.
Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.
Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter.
Sincerely,

Tania Giuliano

From: Janine Farnham <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:52:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

My husband, Curtis Farnham, wrote to you recently regarding religious liberty. I agree with his request. I homeschool our four children, and we deeply appreciate the freedom we have had to do so according to the dictates of our consciences. Below, I am sharing part of my husband's letter, and standing beside him, I too request that your commission please reject the core recommendations of the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, as we believe this would weaken the separation of church and state, particularly by funding religious nonprofits and religious education with taxpayer dollars and repealing the Johnson Amendment.

We are Seventh-day Adventist Christians. Like many Christians, we hold that Jesus Christ is divine, and that His death and resurrection atone for sin. Our objections to this report are
historical and theological. As my husband shared, “Scripture teaches that God wants worship freely given, not coerced. Christ Himself drew the line between these two authorities when He said,
"Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). He never sought Caesar's help to advance His own kingdom. He
told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The First Amendment's guarantee that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or
prohibiting the free exercise thereof" isn't a secular add-on to faith. It's what protects faith's authenticity. The moment government starts funding or favoring religion, it starts refereeing between different religions, deciding whose worship is legitimate. That isn't protection; it's a step toward state-defined religion, which is never genuine worship. It's compliance. History bears this out. Wherever church and state have merged, the result has been persecution. Europe's soil is soaked with the blood of thousands upon thousands of martyrs -- those who worshiped differently than their government demanded. In a stroke of inspired genius, our Founding Fathers broke that pattern by keeping the two separate. It’s no wonder that since then, almost all developed nations have added their own strong religious liberty protections. It’s an idea that’s vital for peace. Do we really want to test this
again?”

Even Benjamin Franklin recognized this danger. He wrote, "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, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one." A faith that needs taxpayer subsidy to thrive has already lost something essential, and there’s nothing the government can do to make up for it.

As for repealing the Johnson Amendment, it would compound the problem: it would make churches financially and politically dependent on politicians instead of accountable to
God, trading spiritual integrity for political access. And singling out any one religion for government preference, even one I might agree with theologically, guarantees that some
other faith, and eventually mine, ends up on the wrong side of that preference. Separation of church and state was built by people of faith, to protect faith. It's how we keep both
church and state free. Preserving that separation, not weakening it, is what truly makes America great.”

Sincerely,
Janine A. Farnham
Fallbrook, California, USA

From: Jayline Rene <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – [TOPIC OR CHAPTER NUMBER] – [NAME].
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:53:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern, please stop what you are trying to do. I don’t want my freedom of religion rights taken from me as a Seventh day Adventist.

Thank you.

From: Rhodi Alers de Lopez <[redacted]>

To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Comm Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter. Sincerely,

Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:53:13 -0400

Importance: Normal

From: Donald McKinnie <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -- Separation of Church and State -- Donald C. McKinnie, Jr., DMin.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:53:34 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the President's Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity for public feedback on your report. As a Christian, and as an ordained minister I am so grateful for the freedoms that God has shed on this great land. I believe that the secret to America's greatness has been the freedom—religious freedom, in particular—that this land has afforded its citizens, as expressed by our Constitution. It was with wisdom that our founding fathers enshrined in our Constitution the First Amendment ensuring the protection of religious freedom. I am therefore grateful for the contribution of every committee, individual and institution that vigilantly stands to protect religious liberty.

It is with these convictions that I wish to express my deep concern over the Commission's report. The first recommendation of the Commission is for the Justice Department to provide clarifying guidance regarding the proper understanding of the separation of church and state. It is my understanding the Commission advocates a metaphorical "bridge" between church and state, rather than the metaphorical "wall" of separation spoken of by President Thomas Jefferson.

While the idea of the wall of separation between church and state may have been used as a pretext to deny people of faith the ability to express their beliefs, as protected by the First Amendment, keen discernment recognizes that the wall of separation is not a means of infringing upon our inalienable rights, but it is the safeguard that preserves them. Any lessening or redefinition of the distinct spheres in which the church and the state operate, will not promote religious liberty will but serve to erode religious liberty. I firmly disagree that we need a bridge between church and state. I affirm that our historic understanding of the Establishment Clause, namely that religious liberty is best promoted when religious practice and expression are kept free of government interference, has served us well for nearly two hundred and fifty years and is the proper understanding of the First Amendment.

History is clear that the union of church and state has repeatedly led to the oppression of those in the minority. That is why I believe any step that will lead to a blurring of the clear lines of separation between the church and the state should trouble all who cherish liberty and freedom. Many of the pilgrims who settled in what would become the United States of America came here because they were fleeing religious persecution in lands where the church was backed by secular power.

Allow me to share one anecdote that I believe is relevant to the inherent danger of eliminating the boundaries between church and state. I recently watched a portion of a podcast (Live Free Podcast posted June 29, 2026) discussing the influence of Christian principles in the founding of our nation. One individual responded to the video with this comment: "People who say the separation of church and state is Constitutional should automatically be prevented from voting. So incredibly sick of that!!!!" I noted three things about this person's comment (who is publicly identified on YouTube as @elizabethpeter7647). First, they believe that the separation of church and state is unconstitutional. Secondly, they feel that people who hold the opposite view should *automatically* be disenfranchised. And third, they are disgusted by the people who say that the separation of church and state is constitutional. This person has some strong feelings about this issue. So much so that, if they had their way, they would take away the right to vote from those who hold a contrary opinion. Thankfully this person does not have that power, or I would be among those losing the right to participate in my government by vote. Nevertheless, I believe that this sentiment exemplifies the spirit of intolerance that has historically arisen whenever church and state are combined.

Finally, I would like to express my position that the Johnson Amendment should be upheld. As a pastor, I take seriously my responsibility to remain unpartisan in my preaching. It is more than a matter of violating our law—it is a matter of being faithful to my call as a minister of the gospel. This means I am called by God to preach His Word. My business is to advocate for Jesus Christ rather than political candidates. When pastors are empowered to endorse political candidates, we run the risk of compromising our sacred calling.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Religious Liberty Commission's report. And for hearing this appeal to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state.

Sincerely,

Donald C. McKinnie, Jr., DMin.
Senior Pastor

Hillside Seventh-day Adventist Church -- Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
Truth Tabernacle Seventh-day Adventist Church -- Dallastown, Pennsylvania

From: Denise Avitia <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Denise Avitia
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:55:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I'm writing as a daughter of Christ, wife and mom, teacher in a Christian school and owner of a Christian bookstore asking that you reconsider your position to weaken the separation of church and state. My husband is an attorney who examines evidence for a living and leads a "For such a time as this" Esther 4:14 Bible study on current events as seen through the lens of Bible prophecy.

I have taught Publications at the academy and been convicted to place the 3 angels of Revelation 14 on the cover of the last 7 yearbooks along with "Remember the Sabbath" from the 4th commandment. This is the only commandment that begins with "Remember". God knew we would forget the true Sabbath which He kept even beginning with creation when He rested on the 7th day and blessed and sanctified it (Genesis 2:2-3).

I am a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian who would be impacted if Sunday became a mandated day of worship, and even though I believe Saturday is the true Sabbath, I would not want legislation or policies to force others to worship on any day and I believe the recommendations in this report could easily lead to that. God does not compel or force us to worship Him. He is loving and "is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9) He wants everyone to be saved but wants us to personally choose. In Deuteronomy 30:19 He says "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live". God gives us the freedom of choice and wants each person to choose Him out of their personal experience and love, not because of force.

If you do not know Him for yourself, I urge you to pray and study for yourself before creating policies which limit how others worship. The Bible prophecies, particularly of Daniel and Revelation show us how this will happen right before Jesus returns. The three angels of Revelation 14 warn us but also offer hope that through our personal relationship with Christ, He will lead us. Each person should be able to choose this for themselves and I believe if you "seek, you will find" (Matthew 7:7). God keeps knocking on the door of our hearts (Revelation 3:20) and will seek us without us having to compel behavior.

I would be happy to study the Bible together to learn these precious promises. I would also be happy to send you a copy of the Great Controversy, a book written in the 1800's which delineates the history of religious persecution through the reformers, but beginning in the chapter "Liberty of Conscience Threatened" it expands on Ecclesiastes 1:9 "what has been will be" to show how what historically lead to religious persecution began with the noble desire to bring people to Jesus. Just before Jesus returns, Satan will try to counterfeit Jesus including a false day of worship. I urge you to study these prophecies for yourself and consider history as you look at where the recommendations in your report will lead.

I also advise you to read the arguments by A.T. Jones as he argued against a proposed Sunday law before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor in 1888. Senator Henry Blair's bill and the arguments against this bill are thoughtfully summarized at americansentinel.org/liberty. Here are a few quotes to consider specifically regarding the exercise of religion as delineated in the first amendment:

"The two religion clauses are one principle, not two competing ones, and this argument shows why. A law supporting religion today is a precedent controlling it tomorrow, because it concedes the decisive point: that religion is a proper subject of legislation. Once that concession is made, everything else is a question of who holds the majority — and majorities change hands. Jones stated it as a flat impossibility before the Senate committee:

“It is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion.” — The National Sunday Law

The reason is structural, not rhetorical. Any religious law must define the religion it favors; every definition includes some believers and excludes others; and even the included are no longer exercising their religion freely — they are exercising it by permission, on terms the legislature may revise. That is why Jones aimed this argument at the winners of religious legislation, not its victims:

“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.” — The Two Republics

“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.” — The National Sunday Law

There is a quiet radicalism in that last sentence. Religious liberty includes the liberty to be persuaded — to change one’s mind, to follow the evidence of Scripture wherever it leads. The man who locks his current creed into law has legislated against his own future conscience.

And lest the principle seem partisan, Jones told the Senate committee that he would fight a law enforcing his own day of worship as strenuously as one enforcing his neighbors’: the wrong lies in religious legislation as such, not in which observance it happens to favor. Few lobbyists in any century have testified against the establishment of their own convictions.

Today: believers who welcome government sponsorship of their faith are trading their birthright for a precedent that will be wielded by every future administration — including those hostile to them. The machinery being proposed does not come with a guarantee about who will operate it next.”

I am not making any statements against the intent, nor the faith of each of you on this commission, but I ask that you look at history, A.T. Jones’ arguments and these Biblical references as well as lift the goals of this commission in your personal prayers. I believe the Lord convicts us on a personal level and we do not need a majority or government to tell us how and when to connect with Him. This freedom is the basis of what our country was founded on. I am lifting each of you and our country in my prayers. May God lead us faithfully to the end to know Him and to be a witness of His love to bring others so that we each can CHOOSE Him so we can all go Home together.

In His Service, Denise Avitia

Denise Avitia

Owner Christian Book and Nutrition

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

--Romans 8:38-39

From: J S Louis <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Jeff Louis
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:56:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a citizen of Georgia who believes deeply in both halves of the First Amendment's religion promise, and I ask the Commission to weigh an argument that I think settles more than it first appears to. American government exists only because the people delegated certain powers to it; that is the whole premise of the Declaration of Independence. But no person can delegate a power he does not himself possess, and no one possesses the power to believe, worship, or answer for another soul before God. I cannot authorize a neighbor to have faith on my behalf, so I certainly cannot authorize a legislature to do so. What was never given by the people was never received by the government. This is not a technical reading of a clause; it means government has no religious jurisdiction to begin with, whether or not it ever sets up a national church. Adding to this, no government will stand before God to answer for its citizens' souls, and authority without ultimate accountability is not legitimate authority at all.

History confirms what logic predicts. Salem's judges in 1692 were not cynics; they were devout men certain they were doing God's service, and they still produced one of the great judicial horrors of our history. Massachusetts Bay ran a theocracy and disciplined dissenters as a matter of course. And this is not confined to the seventeenth century: in 1892, Tennessee jailed Seventh-day Adventist farmers, one of them sixty-two years old, and marched them through the streets of Paris, Tennessee, in a chain gang for quietly plowing on Sunday after having already rested on Saturday. Trainloads of laborers passed the jail every Sunday undisturbed; only the Sabbath-keeping farmer's hoe offended the law. Sincerity did not save Salem's victims and it did not stop Tennessee's sheriffs. Sincerity is exactly what every generation's persecutors have in common, which is why it cannot be the test for whether religious legislation is safe.

I also believe coercion cannot do what only love and conviction can do. Forcing a person indoors, or into a pew, on a mandated holy day does not make him a Christian; it only teaches him to perform belief he does not hold, and multiplies hypocrisy where the law hoped to multiply virtue. The damage is not only to the coerced dissenter but to the favored church itself. Fifteen centuries of established Christianity, by Madison's own accounting, produced pride and indolence in clergy, servility in laity, and bigotry on both sides. A faith that must borrow the policeman's authority to survive has already confessed it lacks the authority of God. General Grant said it plainly: leave religion to the family altar, the church, and private conscience, and keep the state and church forever separate.

Finally, there is no neutral, generic religion available for government to sponsor even if it wanted to. Protestants and Catholics number the Ten Commandments differently and read them through different authorities; a state-mandated display must choose a side and has thereby ruled on a live theological dispute. The same is true of "Bible-based" morality generally: hundreds of traditions claim the Bible, so an officially favored Bible is really somebody's construction of the Bible, backed now by the government's authority rather than the authority of any faith. A congressional committee saw this already in 1830, warning that deciding such questions by statute turns a legislature into an ecclesiastical council, which is not what a republican legislature is for.

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

Respectfully,

Jeff Louis
Georgia

DOJ-RLC Comment-020534

From: Kevin Nutchoo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Response to the Religious Liberty Commission Draft Report - Kevin Nutchoo
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:57:06 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I'd like to express, in the first place, my appreciation for the appointment of this Religious Liberty Commission to address this important matter of Religious Liberty. It is a duty and a necessity to share with you, along with many others, that Religious Liberty is very essential to our lives and to the free expression of our faith. My community of faith is the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, and we dearly value not only morality but also the teachings of the Bible as the foundation and the purpose of our lives. With that perspective, I would like to advocate for Religious Liberty for all, the separation of church and state, and the virtue of the Johnson Amendment.

Religious Liberty for All

Since the beginning of the American Experiment, religious liberty has been the essential pillar for all our liberties, as presented in the First Amendment. The Free Exercise Clause grants the freedom to worship God or not to worship him, according to the choice made in our conscience. When the Puritans arrived in the 17th century, they did not have that freedom, and they did not dispense it in many of the colonies they founded in this land. They fled years and centuries of persecution, where religious liberty was denied, and they were in search of that treasured right. But religious liberty must be for all, and as the preamble of the Declaration of Independence declared that "all men are created equal," and we are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights", those rights are given by God himself, and the government is in charge of protecting and preserving what God has provided for all. Based on that statement, all religions should be equally protected to exercise their faith or non-faith. Religious liberty cannot favoritize one religion above another, which would not be equal and just. As a consequence, this pluralism of ideas and religions should be seen in the public sphere, in our schools, in the army, ... I must also say that in the last few years the principles of faith and Biblical morality have been under attack. Nevertheless, neutrality can be found in public places by mutual respect and freedom as long as it doesn't limit the freedom of someone else. Freedom cannot be advanced or promoted by the use of force but by legislation supported and limited by the Constitution.

Separation of Church and State

The separation of church and state has not always been very popular in America. From the founding fathers to our days, opinions diverge, but it is not so in the Constitution, especially since the Establishment Clause was enacted in 1791, preventing Congress from establishing a National Religion or favoring one religion over another. The separation of Church and State has largely contributed to the flourishing of religious pluralism while coexisting with the values of the Judeo-Christian worldview. Some have refuted the idea of the separation of church and state as it appears through the first draft of this report, indicating that America was founded as a Christian nation, that its founders were mostly Christians, and that the separation of Church and State has advantaged those who have a different worldview than what the Christians have. But what history shows is different. Many of the founding fathers were indeed Christians, but many hold different views of what the American republic should be like. Some were anglicans, Episcopalians, baptists, catholics, deists, freemasons, ... The expression related to a Creator or nature doesn't necessarily mean that they believe in the Jesus of the Bible. They all agreed on the morals of the Bible, and that is apparent in the Jefferson Bible, where only the Biblical morals were conserved. America was founded on Biblical principles or morals, but not religion. Many of the colonies were isolated and did not offer religious liberty to their inhabitants. The emergence of the separation of

church and state really started with Roger Williams, considered the pioneer of that cause. The Rhode Island colony was the first to be established on the principle of Religious Liberty. He is the first one to voice the importance of a separation between the "garden of the church" and "the wilderness of the state". It has been true all through history that governments united with state religion have been responsible for 1260 years of oppression against the conscience of the people. Then, Jefferson, in its letter to the Danbury Baptists in 1802, coined the metaphor of a "wall of separation between church and state". The approach presented in the report is that a bridge is enough and that a wall is not necessary. The problem is that churches and governments need boundaries so that society can be maintained in freedom. A bridge would be at odds with the vision our founding fathers expressed through the Establishment Clause. Only a total separation maintains freedom, because there is no freedom guaranteed if the government could decide what its citizens should believe and not. Even God did not want this state of things, since he created with free will, which is one element of being in the image of God. He maintained freedom throughout history by the redemption that all mankind received in Christ, I believe. Deciding to change the order of things would not only threaten humanity but also the government of heaven. Consider the one who is above us all, that he came to give us liberty, the law of liberty, and the Spirit of Liberty. God used America for that purpose, and changing that could provoke the ruin of that country, since we have never lived without the liberty to choose who we desire to worship.

The Virtue of the Johnson Amendment

The Johnson Amendment is sought to be repealed according to Recommendation number 9. This amendment has been securing the separation of church and state regarding the involvement of churches in politics. But this amendment has already been challenged, even though it is part of the Federal law. People can be involved in politics at an individual level if they desire so but mobilize a church to support any political party defy the purpose of the Church. Because Jesus said in John 18:36 "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Since Jesus himself mobilized the church to bring the Gospel (the Divine truth), it is not recommendable from any Biblical standpoint to advance a human message instead of the Divine message. The church has received a Divine mandate and politics is not part of it. Using religion to promote politics would divide the country more than unite it. There is virtue to maintain and preserve what constitute us the people of God separated from secular worldviews.

Conclusion

In short, Religious Liberty for All, Separation of Church and State, and the Amendment Johnson constitute a protection for the faith or non-faith of all. Changing the relation of the government with religion will affect many lives and destabilize the country for the sake of God and the people of America, let us follow the wisdom to uphold the constitution and the law of God as outlines in the Golden Law that Jesus gives "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them".

Thank you for considering these thoughts and convictions! God gives you wisdom!

From: Betsy Mayer <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] My comments on the Religious Liberty Commission report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:57:57 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Chairman Patrick and Vice-chairman Carson,

I live in the tri-county area of Virginia (Madison, Orange, Culpeper counties) where the 18th century Virginia Baptists fought to establish a government that recognized the need and protection for a separation between church and state. These Baptist preachers had fought valiantly in the American war for Independence only to be imprisoned because they could not conscientiously submit to the Virginia requirement that preachers from all denominations must be licensed and under the supervision of the ecclesiastical control of the Episcopalian church which still had an iron grip on the practice of religion in Virginia. They appealed to Scripture for the basis of their claims to preach unmolested and unsupervised by the established church because they took their marching orders from God: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15. For their convictions, they endured onerous fines, severe public whippings that left several maimed for life, and cruel imprisonment for months at a time.

John Leland, a leading Virginia Baptist preacher and politician, was instrumental in helping James Madison understand and articulate principles that protected minority beliefs and practices. John Leland was a Baptist from New England who had been influenced by the views of Roger Williams—the 17th century American patriot who had opened the way in Rhode Island for Baptists and others to worship freely or who didn’t want to worship at all without fear of persecution. **It was a persecuted Baptist from a minority faith that influenced Madison’s text of the First Amendment to the American Constitution which included the principles of the separation of Church and State.**

To say that the separation of church and state is a myth or a lie, or that it was invented by Thomas Jefferson is misinformation. The concept of a wall separating the church from the wilderness of the world is articulated in Roger Williams’ writings a good 150 years before Thomas Jefferson’s letter to the Danbury Baptists.

I am a Seventh-day Adventist and I observe the Sabbath of Creation from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. This is a minority view among Christians in the United States. When a religious majority gains the support of the government for their institutions, beliefs, and practices, those in the minority are often disadvantaged, disparaged, and even persecuted for their faith. When implemented wisely, this was what the separation of church and state could prevent.

Religious neutrality on the part of the government creates the opportunity for each faith to have equal access to the hearts and minds of Americans. It allows each faith to appeal for support from believers, not from the government. It prevents the disparagement of the faith of someone like Carrie Prejean Boller who was accused of being an anti-Semite and removed from your commission because she does not believe that the modern state of Israel is a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. I do not believe this view either, but this doesn’t make me or her a Jew hater or make me desire to see Jews mistreated in society any more than I would want to see a Muslim, an Atheist, or a Hindu made to feel othered and disparaged for not holding to Christian beliefs. This is why the report of the Religious Liberty Commission is alarming to those of us who see where this could lead—to government preference for some religious groups and not others, to the entanglement of the government in deciding what religious beliefs are considered “supportable,” to the use of the pulpit to endorse politicians and

political agendas, and the use of political means by Christians to control the practices of others in order to “save the nation.”

Certainly your committee has had good intentions to protect the free expression of Christians in a secular society. You have wanted to prevent secular courts from punishing the free expression and practice of Christian beliefs around the issues of gender, marriage, and family. However, I believe that a reaction to secular persecution of Christian expression has led to an equally dangerous view that Christians must have more access to the levers of power in order to prevent this from happening in the future.

History is not kind to this arrangement. The American Constitution was a response to the misguided approach of governments in the old world to regulate the religious beliefs and practices of its citizens. The American case for religious neutrality on the part of the US government is to allow each faith to be promoted and supported by its own adherents. If Christians are in the majority in the US population, they shouldn’t need the support of the government to uphold their faith and practice. Therefore, a wall which allows Christians to freely proselytize would ensure that converts could be won through persuasion not through political inducement or coercion.

I urge you to reconsider your commissions recommendations on the following points:

1. Financial support for religious, faith based non-profits
2. Financial support for religious education
3. Politicization of Churches and Religious non-profits by repealing the Johnson Amendment.
4. Singling out one religion for special government protection
5. Indoctrination of Americans in the ideology of the Commission.

Sincerely,

Betsy Mayer

PII

From: Heide Cox <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment — My People Were Persecuted Under Religious Laws in America; Do Not Rebuild That Road
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:58:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist. For my church, religious persecution in America is not a hypothesis — it is family history.

Between 1885 and 1896, scores of Adventists were prosecuted under state Sunday laws. Men were fined, imprisoned, and sentenced to labor on chain gangs alongside criminals — for the crime of quietly plowing their fields or working in their shops on Sunday, after having rested on the Bible Sabbath. These laws were defended, then as now, as expressions of the nation's Christian morality.

In 1888, our representative A. T. Jones testified before the Senate against a national Sunday-rest bill. He warned even the religious majority that supported it: "No man can allow any legislation in behalf of the religion, or the religious observances, in which he himself believes, without forfeiting his own religious freedom." That principle — not hostility to faith — is why we have defended the separation of church and state for 140 years, through the American Sentinel of Jones's day and Liberty magazine in ours.

I commend the report's support for workplace religious accommodation, which protects Sabbath-keepers, and its concern for conscience rights. But I urge the Commission to reconsider the recommendations that would weaken the Establishment Clause, mandate religious displays in schools, and expand government-sponsored religious instruction. Laws favoring majority religious practice always fall hardest on religious minorities — we bear the scars that prove it.

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

Respectfully,

Heide Cox
Partridge, Kansas

From: Maddy Farnor <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] The separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:58:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

Hello. As a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian, I believe that church and state should be separate. No government entity has the right to dictate who we worship, how we worship, or when we worship. The Lord tells us very clearly and in direct quotes in Exodus 20 versus 8 through 11, Isaiah 58 versus 12-14, Isaiah 6623, and in mark chapter 2 verses 27 and 28 which day is his day. First day worship is a man-made Institution which did not begin in Bible times but it began after when man was attempting to unite Christianity and paganism and the first day of the week, Sunday, became the vehicle to accomplish that. Sunday was the day in which pagans worshiped the sun. Sunday worship is the product of church and state uniting. By enforcing a false Sabbath, we prove that we have learned nothing from history. Maddy

From: Teresa Kocher <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to Religious Liberty Committee report, completed in June 2026
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:58:55 -0400
Importance: Normal

To: The Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission and Others involved,

Hello,

In response to the Report referenced in the subject, I have some strongly held beliefs, experiences, & knowledge of the Bible pertinent to these findings & interpretations. First, I heard a comment made "We should make 1 million bumper stickers that say, 'There is no separation of church and state.' I think it's only fair that the ability to respond to this report that determined this finding, be made Just as Public, as I know many people that believe otherwise as to what the Constitution is saying. Yet the ability for the public to respond to The Committees findings, hasn't been expounded on 'to the people of this nation' by comparison.
Though the the exact phrase, There is Separation of Church & State isn't used in the Constitution. The Constitution teaches fully otherwise. The 1st Amendment is very clear, "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."
The 9th Amendment states," The enumeration in the Constitution, of certain rights, shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people."
In the 1965 Supreme Court case Griswold v Connecticut- the court ruled that even though the word "privacy" doesn't appear anywhere in the Constitution; that a married couples right to privacy is a Fundamental Right, protected by the 9th Amendment of the Constitution.
That's just 1 example of how the meaning of the Constitution w Amendments, etc were thoroughly discussed by the framers of the Constitution & others involved. There is much literature, documents, discussions showing the expoundment & the importance & all the time, effort, critical thinking, & doing their best to look at these concepts of our government to make a successful, fair, & I shall even say as an opinion a Godly nation. God does not force the conscience to worship & believe in Him. He draws us to Him & gives us understanding through many avenues, such as nature, the love & guidance of parents, His Word, interactions with Christians who are led by the Holy Spirit, His goodness & mercy— I could go on.
Jesus never used the state/the government to teach & preach the gospel, & to enforce laws. Now I do believe the last 6 Commandments are an excellent guide to make laws, & many of our laws are founded on these principles & others of the Bible. Jesus established His church on earth to preach the gospel & make disciples. I believe if the church were fulfilling its Commission as Christ taught- we wouldn't be having this conversation. The United States is not a theocracy- yes we began as a Protestant nation & as a Republic. Our forefathers endured unreal persecution in Europe due to a church/ state combination- as when the Popes were telling the Kings what to do. And the papacy was misleading people by misinterpreting the Bible, interpreting the Bible falsely for financial gain- such as indulgences.; people weren't even allowed to have Bibles. Christians were severely persecuted & murdered during the Dark Ages. Our government was put together (our Constitution) to prevent that from ever happening again. Roger Williams was significant in bringing to the attention of our lawmakers & to James Madison, who some say is the 'Father of our Constitution' - the deep understanding of the persecution endured by the state & church controlling each other. He was severely persecuted by some Colonists for his stance that the government shouldn't force people to attend church, that they shouldn't interfere in our personal relationship with God, or punish religious dissenters. What was happening is some of the Religious colonists were performing the same acts in the name of Christianity, that they had endured in Europe- agains fellow colonists that didn't believe or behave exactly like them.
R. Williams is one of my hero's. Some of my forefathers came from England. A husband/wife somehow obtained a Bible, & the top church leaders found out, & said they were not allowed to have a Bible. They refused to give

it up. So when they each died- they were buried outside of the fence of the cemetery around the church. The meaning of this was that they would not be in Heaven, but in hell for not giving up their Bible, according to those laws. I am so proud to tell my children this story.
The undoing of the Constitution will be the undoing of our nation. Look at the early Roman Empire.
Also, the 10 Commandments being brought into certain states, such as Texas, Tennessee, Florida Is a misnomer, & also Unconstitutional. I think the fact that they aren't writing out the 10 Commandments as God wrote with His own finger in Exodus 20- is an insult & the lie of omission.
I'm a Seventh Day Adventist Christian, & originally became a Christian at 17 by personal Bible study alone.
I appreciate that the Committee made the attempt to protect Religious Liberty- but something went awry. I hope this changes.

Thank you,
Teresa Kocher

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Cc: Nilufer Torun <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] To the Justice Department Re: Recommendations of the Presidential Commission of Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

I, Nilufer Torun, agree with the below submitted response.
Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Nilufer Torun

From: Sawyer <[redacted]>
To: [redacted] <[redacted]>
Sent: Monday, July 13, 2026 at 01:44:17 PM PDT
Subject: Public Comment --Presidential Religious Liberty Commission's recommendations as they relate to Church and State Union --Sawyer D'Amico

Greetings from Southern California to the Presidential Commission of Religious Liberty,

I agree with Pillar of Freedom's Comments. Please implement them, and please uphold the implementation of the Johnson Amendment.

As a conservative, I can tell you that this is not a Red vs Blue issue, but something of a National Security issue. For to have the security and peace of the nation, it takes the continual blessings of the world's Creator and Savior whom the Founding Fathers drew inspiration from.

The Executive Summary fails to mention some of the reports central recommendations: funding religious non-profit activities, funding religious education and religious clubs on public campuses, repealing the Johnson Amendment, which restricts church's political activities; it further supports special treatment given to Jewish people and the nation-state of Israel; I desire for the US complete neutrality in the government's relationship with religion. I object to the government showing such favoritism and meddling in areas it has no business in. Has everyone forgotten opening of First Amendment "Establishment Clause" -- that congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion? The government is supposed to remain neutral in matters of faith -- that yours and my faith, or lack thereof, remain protected.

It is very clear the Commission is being counseled with a faulty report of history. Our nation can never become great again, until it first becomes righteous again. It is imperative that we consider why God shed his grace on this once humble nation and allowed it to become strengthened and empowered to what it is today.

Our nation's pilgrim fore-fathers fled Europe to seek religious freedom from the tyranny of both Popes and Kings with respect to their Church-State union. There is an excellent chapter 16 on this matter in the book, The Great Controversy by Ellen White, and it was a righteous cause to flee such a dark state of Society even to virtually unknown, far-away lands as America was to them because their current status of society under Church-State union, they recognized, will always have little-to no hope for change. Such absolute power corrupts absolutely!

It is the principles of separation of Church and State, that grant us liberty of conscience, which from there enables principles to be drawn fourth that create the possibility for ideas and rights of freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of assembly, and the right to bear arms to name a few foundational ones that the rest of our Bill of Rights are anchored upon. It all starts with separation of Church and State

With separation of Church and State, you have the right to be wrong in this country. But if you have Church-State union -- you ONLY will have the right to be right -- that is, to be correct according to the State dictates for your what is politically and/or religiously correct! This inevitably creates oppressive tyranny as seen in other lands where you see the attempt of the Muslim Caliphate across the Middle East, or in China where other religions other than their designated politically correct ones that the CCP does not feel threatened by are not welcome and must therefore worship in the underground; North Korea, which professes there is no God (rendering them Atheist?), also has its people worship their Supreme Leader as if he is God... and this is no different than the influence of Popes and Kings in past European History having absolute, totalitarian influence upon society without checks and balances to safeguard religious liberty and freedom of conscience. Is this what we want America to devolve unto? What profit us to return to archaic, sub-par standards?

The Johnson Amendment will further politicize America's churches. This is not a good thing. Church is for the furthering of the gospel, not pushing politician's agenda's. This was seen in Nazi Germany as they forced out (or killed) all the German preachers, and replaced them with state-sponsored heralds of Nazi propaganda. Where my President may cater and pander to the Bible-belt, religious right class within middle America and the South (which there is nothing wrong with that) -- trying to take the sacred institution of the Lord's House, whose pulpit and messages are reserved for His gospel purposes , instead for mortal man's political agendas. It is beyond sacrilegious and borders on blasphemy (to make oneself equal with God -- See John 10:30-33;

Matt 26:63-65).

It is my opinion that America needs the healing blessing of what the gospel can do in peoples lives, but this must be chosen at the individual level, and never forced or coerced. Jesus always bid people to follow Him and his teachings, and did not rise up in political office to enforce his beliefs. "My kingdom is not of this world" John 18:36. Christ's method, and Christ's method alone of winning hearts and minds on an individual basis as he went about and encountered people is how the gospel went out and is still to go out by Christians, and letting people choose for themselves whether they would allow Him and His teachings to be the king of their lives and hearts. You cannot force love, nor does politically rallying church congregations and pastors to spew political agendas produce genuine faith relationship in Jesus. This is a counterfeit, spurious faith that reeks of Bible prophecy's Mark of the Beast practices where there is no separation of Church and state. Whether or not you believe in Bible prophecy, funding religious, non-profit activities, and turning the government sectarian is just one step closer to losing freedom for everyone. This is not what America was built for, nor is it what has led to our blessedness over the 250 years of its history.

For these and many other reasons -- though these are reasons enough -- I object to these recommendations on the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission that will further weaken the separation of Church and State.

Thank you for time,

sincerely,

Sawyer D'Amico

PS:

My church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, has a great magazine that is free unto many who simply sign up --- Liberty Magazine -- and ought to be considered as you form your understanding of these unprecedented times we live in. Our church also has a great book that addresses from the lens of history, politics, and religion a great conflict between good and evil that culminates prophetically at the end of the world a Sunday Law Crisis that the Supreme Court and Congress shall enforce, thus repudiating the bedrock foundations that God has blessed this nation for -- separation of church and state and the corresponding liberty of conscience that follows. The book, which I already referenced above, is called the Great Controversy. For almost 200 years our church has taught that these very issues would arise, because, the Bible reveals as much in a deep study of the 2nd Beast of Revelation 13, and The Great Controversy gives further details into how this can come about. It is a must read, and is even in the Library of Congress. Aside from the Bible being #1, this just might be 2nd most important book you may ever read and you dont need to be religious to appreciate it -- especially if you work in government.

"

From: Jennifer P <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT-Jennifer Pharo
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 16:59:27 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: PILLAR_OF_FREEDOM-Reilgious_Liberty_Letter.odt

Jennifer P [redacted]

PII

July 13. 2026 To Whom it May Concern,

I was born an American citizen, I am tax paying, law abiding, woman of faith. I highly value my God given freedom to choose when and where to worship. America has prospered because it was founded on the principal of this religious freedom. If we start to rescind these freedoms, such as suspending the Johnson Act, I fear it will be a downward slide toward the elimination of my choice.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I choose to worship God on the Sabbath day, as found in the Bible; Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 23:12, Leviticus 23:3, and in other Biblical texts. I anticipate my Savior's soon return, and know my tiny voice is heard by my Creator in a sea of many, many voices.

Do not listen to the conflicting voices of the masses, listen to God's voice. He never forced anyone to follow Him. He grants us the freedom to choose for ourselves.

If our government decides to give special recognition and re-numeration to certain faith based churches, it will not be fair nor safe to the others. Size does not mean said groups are in the right. When American separated from England at our founding, we were the smaller of the two warring factions, did that automatically make us wrong?

And what will the outcome of said preferential treatment be? Hunger for power among the various groups will lead to bribery, and the powerful will grow stronger & stronger. As the citizenry perceive this favoritism, they too will be motivated to follow the favored group and one Denomination will grow stronger and stronger, and others weaker and weaker. Eventually the voices of the small group or groups will aggravate the larger group and laws to suppress and force will follow. It is not what I want my America to become. For the love of God, please do not take this step

Respectfully,

Jennifer L Pharo

PII

From: Alilia Blodgett <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Alilia Blodgett
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:03:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and citizen of the United States of America, I have concerns about this country's intention to build bridges between church and state and repeal the Johnson Amendment. Please reconsider your stance on these items. I believe the historical walls of separation between the church and state that our country has practiced have been protective of God's people as outlined in Revelation 12:16 where the earth helped the woman (the church, the bride of Christ).

Historically whenever church and state have been united, the result has been persecution, and I believe we need to protect God's people in this great nation from that evil as long as we possibly can. Let each operate in their own sphere.

There is plenty of room for faith in the operation of the government, as our founding fathers gave evidence of theirs in the writing of our earliest documents, including the Declaration of Independence. However, we don't want to recreate the situation that our early pioneers were fleeing from: namely, religious persecution. There will inevitably be favoritism if we go down this road. Please use caution.

I agree with other Seventh-day Adventists and organizations, such as Pillar of Freedom, who have stated their cases more eloquently than I have been able to. Thank you for taking our comments into consideration before writing your final report.

Sincerely,

Alilia Blodgett
Dexter, Maine

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Response to the President's Religious Liberty Commission's Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:06:19 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Commission and Advisory Board members,

After reviewing your draft report, I am deeply concerned by some of the conclusions you reach, and extensive changes you intend to make based on these. Even an average knowledge of history warns me that there are highly likely to be serious negative consequences for religious liberty. This means destroying the very thing you profess to be trying to promote. I note in section 2, that these policies are not merely meant for USA, but through the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, will be promoted throughout the world.

As a Seventh Day Adventist Christian, I am watching with interest the rise of Christian Nationalism, the ascendency of political influence by the Roman Catholic Church in the American government, the United Nations Organization, and most other prominent nations. As the last hold-out of Protestantism still protesting, I and many of my SDA acqaintances feel vulnerable to future persecution, and this documentation makes it a lot more likely. The protection afforded us till now by the first amendment and separation of church and state built into the American Constitution, will go away, if the conclusions of this commission are accepted by our government and the world.

The draft report makes it clear that hence forward, our government will no longer accept the obvious presence of the wall of separation between church and our government, so freely spoken of by the most prominent architects of our government and constitution. It was one of the reasons I chose to immigrate to this country, and have deeply respected it. Reading the report, however, I find a very one-sided, simplistic portrayal of the early history in the colonies, regarding separation of church and state, or lack thereof, which resulted in perpetrating tyranny and persecution on their fellow colonists who believed differently than themselves. Ironically, this was very similar to that which caused them to come to USA, originally fleeing the tyranny and persecution by Catholicism and The Church of England in Europe. We all know the story of Roger Williams, and the founding of Rhode Island, and how the need for keeping the church out of the government (which had resulted in the slaughter of than 100 million protestants by the Catholic church and its Catholic monarchs) and the government out of the church (which corrupted and politicized the churches in the colonies.) By the time our constitution was drafted, a political edifice that ensured the crafting of a system where religion was intentionally forbidden from meddling in government, and the government was walled off from meddling with religion. I studied this, while home schooling my children and it is plain and clear for all to see.

As an SDA, I believe implicitly in the Bible and the Bible alone. That includes all 10 of the Ten commandments, including the 7th Day Sabbath, sanctified and given to all humans at creation. The 4th commandment stipulates that not only you, but even "the stranger that is within your gates", and your servants and animals, are to keep the sabbath holy, and do no work. God ordered us to work on the other 6, including the first, i.e. Sunday. The Catholic Church claims responsibility for promulgating the switch from Saturday to Sunday, and documents a study of every text pertaining to the Sabbath in the entire Bible, proving that it was never changed by God. See Rome's Challenge to Protestants in the Catholic publication *'Our Daily Mirror'* Sept 2 - Sept 16 1893. Note the following quote: "*Hence the conclusion is inevitable: viz that those who follow the Bible as their guide, the Israelites and the Seventh Day Adventists have the exclusive weight of evidence on their side, while the Biblical Protestant has not a word in defense of his substitution of Saturday for Sunday."* Devout SDA's will die rather than break God's Sabbath.

It is common to hear evangelicals and Christian Nationalists hotly pushing the introduction of Sunday laws, and defending the death penalty for breaking the. Douglas Wilson and Stephen Wolfe were invited onto the Heritage and Hope Youtube channel to discuss their views with a group of SDA's and freely admitted the danger for us in future, should they prevail in destroying the separation of church and state that currently protects us.

This is not a theoretical issue for me. My Ancestors were French Huguenot's who fled the slaughter of their brethren in France by the Catholic Church, for following the Bible, and fortunately found refuge in England, were their religious freedom was respected. Also in 1888, when the Blair Sunday laws were being pushed in America, SDA's were arrested and some placed in chain gangs and even killed, for doing simple chores on Sundays, on their farms. One

of our members, A>T>Jones testified before the US Congress, and the supreme court ruled in favor of religious freedom.

With great concern I read your draft report, and hope that you will reconsider your putative conclusions and actions before tyranny and persecution result. Governments can legislate against crimes effectively as there are enforceable punishments for the as them. It is impossible to legislate against sin, i.e. the breaking of the first 4 commandments as no government can read our minds, and is left with only one option and that is to enforce by tyranny, nd initiate an inquisition-like witch hunt, and a re-living of went on in Europe when the Roman Catholic church attempted to exterminate the protestants, the last of which the SDA's are.

I beg you to reconsider your conclusions and intensions, and spare the world a repeat of the Dark Ages.

Sincerely,

Lesley Clarke

Sent with Proton Mail secure email.

From: maureen anderson <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:07:29 -0400
Importance: Normal

I wholeheartedly agree with Alexander Bowen. I support his beliefs as a practicing Adventist Christian.
Thank you, Maureen Anderson

Sent from my iPhone

From: Tyrell Jackson <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:08:17 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Presidential Commission

I am Tyrell of Ephesus Seventh Day Adventist Church in San Antonio and I oppose the proposition of eliminating the separation of Church and State because that proposal completely contradicts the first amendment of the Constitution. Furthermore, the idea of eliminating the separation of Church and State goes against the freedoms of the public. If you value freedom of conscience, then you must maintain the separation of Church and State.

Sincerely,

Tyrell Jackson

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

From: Ilean Forward <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] A Response to the Threat to the Freedom and Liberty of Conscience of Americans
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:15:50 -0400
Importance: Normal

A Response to the Threat to the Freedom and Liberty of Conscience of Americans

To those who desire to dismiss, discount and disregard the our religious freedom:

It is my belief that freedom and liberty of conscience means that I am able to make choices without coercion, pressure or persecution and that my choices will not infringe on the lives, rights and choices of others and that includes the choices made regarding a person's religious/spiritual beliefs. To combine all of the auspices of the "church" and all of the aspects of the "state" and ignore the foundation on which the "church" is established (God's sovereignty), is to usurp authority that has not been given and will never be given. God's love, His authority and His laws are eternal and cannot be dismissed, discounted and/or disregarded for much longer.

"The earth [is] the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Psalm 24:1 KJV

In His Word, it says that He will do a strange act.

"The LORD will come as he did against the Philistines at Mount Perazim and against the Amorites at Gibeon. He will come to do a strange thing; he will come to do an unusual deed: For the Lord, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, has plainly said that he is determined to crush the whole land. So scoff no more, or your punishment will be even greater." Isaiah 28:21, 22 NLT

HE IS GOD AND THERE IS NONE ELSE!

Marea [redacted]
Seventh-Day Adventist and American Citizen

From: Randall Butler <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:17:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

My name is Randall Butler,
I am a fifth-generation Seventh-day Adventist. I believe that, were the churches to be given the power to advise the state in civil matters, they would ultimately be obliged to petition the state to enforce their dogmas and creeds upon the populace. If individuals did not subscribe to those creeds, the marginalization and persecution of those who worship God according to their own consciences would inevitably follow. As was the case with the Apostle Paul:

"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."
— Acts 24:14 (KJV)

This merging of Church and State is precisely the image of the beast Revelation 13 warns us about, and I submit my appeal to those of this Religious Liberty Commission to not take the final step in the forming of that image.

Please take the time and read this article:

JN Loughborough,
Review and Herald Jan.15, 1861

Image of the Beast

It may be said that the making of the image of the beast is yet future, and that there are no means of telling how it will be done. I think the best way to form our theories upon this subject would be to look at the rise of the first beast—to look at the steps which were gradually taken to bring it into action as a persecuting power. Similar steps will probably be taken to make an image to the beast that were taken to make the beast.

Some have said when an image to the beast is made it will enforce Purgatory and all the doctrines of the Papal church. That would not necessarily be the case. A power that should enforce the doctrines of the Papacy would restore Papacy instead of making an image. An image to anything must be something that is in appearance like the thing, yet is not the thing itself. An image to the Papacy we should understand would be some other class of religionists that should take similar steps in enforcing its sentiments to those taken by the Papacy.
We think it can be made clear that but five distinct steps were taken by the church before she came into the position marked in prophecy as the "beast with seven heads and ten horns." We think we can show that four of those steps have been taken by the nominal, creed-making Protestants of this time; and they are already striving to take the fifth step, which will fully constitute them the image to that beast.

The five overt steps taken by the church were:

- First, the making of a creed. For this purpose Conventions were

  called, Synods and Councils convened, and the result was a great universal creed.

- The second step was to make that creed a rule of faith and test of fellowship.

This was no sooner done than it was decided to try unruly members by the creed instead of the Bible.

- So for the third step, this creed became the tribunal by which men were judged.

- The fourth step was to brand all as heretics who did not subscribe to the creed.

- In the fifth step they obtained the aid of the civil law to enforce penalties on those whom they had branded as heretics.

It was for some time after they had formed their creeds, that they could only threaten what they would do to heretics, but they did not punish them because no laws were passed by which they could do it.

Link to original article: https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Periodicals/RH/RH18610115-V17-09.pdf

I believe that if the separation of church and state were to be deemed unconstitutional, the repudiation of every remaining principle found in our constitution would quickly follow, resulting in the passing of laws enforcing Roman Catholic/Protestant dogma, ending with the widespread persecution of dissenters, completing the fifth and final step in forming the "image of the beast" of Rev. 13,

Each and every American has been granted the inalienable right by God the Father to worship Him (or whoever one chooses to worship) according to his or her conscience and to reject anything that may lead to the removal of that liberty, whether it concerns the Trinity, Sunday sacredness, the denial of the modern State of Israel as "God's chosen people," or, especially, the claim made in **Public Law 102-14** that our country was founded on the Seven Noahide Laws of the Babylonian Talmud and the notion that our country must enforce these laws in order: **"to return the world to the moral and ethical values contained in the Seven Noahide Laws."**
https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-joint-resolution/104/text/enrGuillotines

FYI: Rabbi Schneerson, has been memorialized in every "Education and Sharing Day" (Public Law 102-14) proclamation. **This man taught that a gentile who observes the Seventh Day Sabbath** (such as my self) according to his or her conscience, and in a similar manner as does Judaism, is in violation of 2 of 7 of these laws (stealing & adultery) and therefore **is subject to the death penalty** (all violations are punishable by death according to the Talmud).

I implore all of you (especially Dr. Carson), please vote against any measure that would facilitate the union of church and state, a union which will surely result in the removal of the bulwark protecting the freedoms upon which our country was "originally" founded, severing whatever remaining connection this country has with God, ending with her complete and utter ruin.

I know that this will likely fall on deaf ears, but I do pray by God's grace, that whoever may read this will study the word of God and recognize that we are on the very cusp of the mark of the beast crises (the acceptance of the traditions of men over the Law of God) and the subsequent return of Jesus Christ.

May God help this country, but never the less come quickly Lord Jesus.🙏

Links to relevant subject matter:

https://asknoah.org/faq/why-gentiles-must-not-keep-ritual-sabbath

https://judaism.stackexchange.com/questions/20585/why-shouldnt-gentiles-keep-shabbat

Keep fighting the good fight.
God Bless, and Kind regards,

Randall Butler

From: John Rengifo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty Commission – John Rengifo, Maryland
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:20:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Those Whom it May Concern:

As a proud citizen of the United States, a husband, father, and a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I thank you for the **work of the Religious Liberty Commission** and for the opportunity to provide public comment. I understand the threats to religious liberty and religious expression in recent years, and I appreciate efforts to protect the rights of people of faith in the public square.

At the same time, I would encourage the Commission to avoid approaches that could unintentionally weaken religious liberty for others. Throughout American history, religious freedom has flourished best when government **protects the rights of all faiths** rather than appearing to endorse one particular religious tradition. Policies that place the authority of the state behind *specific religious expressions* may be welcomed by some today, but could become a challenge for religious minorities tomorrow.

I am also concerned that government promotion of particular religious practices or symbols in public institutions may blur the distinction between the role of church and state. Seventh-day Adventists have long supported a robust separation of church and state—not because religion should be excluded from society, but because faith is strongest when it is embraced freely rather than encouraged by governmental authority. The same constitutional protections that safeguard majority faiths also protect minority faiths, those of different convictions, and those of no faith.

Religious liberty is most secure when government remains **neutral in matters of religion** while vigorously defending the freedom of every individual to believe, worship, speak, and practice their faith according to conscience. I pray that in our noble intentions to promote religious liberty, we are not giving favoritism or excluding one religious tradition over another.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

--
John Rengifo
Ministerial Director
Chesapeake Conference
[redacted]
[redacted] *ext. 346*

From: Craig King <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:46:15 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: RLC_Public_Comment_-_Craig_King_-_2026-07-13.pdf

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Monday, July 13, 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 Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write today as a citizen of the United States of America who loves this country, and as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, to respectfully but firmly oppose the central thesis of the draft report: that the “wall of separation between church and state” is a modern myth to be replaced with a “bridge,” and that “church and state strengthen and support one another” (Conclusion). I object in particular to Recommendation 1, which would have the Department of Justice redefine the Establishment Clause by executive guidance; to Recommendation 9, which would repeal the Johnson Amendment; and to the recommendations that would channel public funds to religious institutions and religious education. A fuller statement of the biblical, historical, and legal grounds for this opposition accompanies this summary.

Let me begin where I agree with you. No student should be punished for praying quietly. No soldier should be denied his turban, his kosher meals, or his Sabbath. No nurse should be coerced to violate her conscience, and no shelter should be forced to surrender the convictions that animate its mission. I stand also with the churches, schools, and ministries pressured by the state to abandon their biblical convictions regarding gender identity and sexuality, abortion, and the sanctity of human life. No institution should be compelled to renounce the teachings of Scripture as the price of serving its neighbors. These examples could be multiplied. The free exercise of religion deserves vigorous defense, and I commend the Commission for defending it. But the report draws the wrong lesson from these wrongs. The remedy for government hostility toward religion is a staunchly protected First Amendment, not government embrace and support of religion. Both roads, government hostility to religion and government support of religion, inevitably lead to the same error: man presuming authority in a realm that belongs exclusively to God.

The wall between church and state can be traced back 3,500 years to the Ten Commandments, spoken on Mount Sinai by God Himself and written with His own finger in tables of stone. The first table of the law comprises the whole of man’s duty to God; the second table, the whole of man’s duty to his fellow man. It is over the second table alone that civil government has any rightful jurisdiction. Christ affirmed that distinction: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). To civil government are entrusted civil things, the ordering of justice between man and man; God alone holds authority over worship, conscience, and the loyalty of the soul. Before Pilate He declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). The clearest demonstration of what happens when religious zeal borrows civil power is the crucifixion itself: religious leaders who lacked legal authority to execute obtained a civil sentence from a governor who found no fault in Him. From Christ, that principle has been carried by a long line of men and

women who dared to speak and act their conscience: from Roger Williams, who in 1644, a century and a half before Jefferson, wrote of the "hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wildernes of the world," to the persecuted Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut, to whom Jefferson addressed his famous letter. The wall was built by believers, for believers. Your report's claim that it "only took off in the mid-twentieth century" is simply not historically factual.

The American experiment has succeeded, notwithstanding its flaws, precisely because of two liberties. Religious liberty: we have no established church and answer to no pope or prelate in matters of religion. Civil liberty: we are not governed by a king, but operate, at least in principle, as a nation of laws that apply equally to everyone, legislated by an elected body of representatives. Both liberties stem from the Protestant understanding of liberty: the repudiation of the idea that kings have a "divine right" to rule, or that a man should submit his conscience in matters of religion to another man, whether he be a priest, bishop, or pope. If every man may go to the Word of God to learn his duty and conscientiously live it out, then a more just system of government could be established, deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed: a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Madison, father of the Constitution, warned 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," and testified that after "almost fifteen centuries" the fruits of legal establishment had been "pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution." As President he vetoed a bill merely incorporating an Episcopal church as exceeding "the essential distinction between Civil and Religious functions," and explained that he had "always regarded the practical distinction between Religion and Civil Government as essential to the purity of both." Washington assured the Baptists of Virginia that he would never have signed the Constitution had he thought it "might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical Society," and told the Hebrew Congregation at Newport that this government "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance," adding that in America "it is now no more that toleration is spoken of," for religious liberty is an inherent natural right, not an indulgence. Franklin wrote that when a religion cannot support itself "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." Jefferson's Virginia Statute declared that "Almighty God hath created the mind free," and that coercion in religion is "a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion." The framers wrote a Constitution containing no religious test "ever" (Article VI) and a First Amendment forbidding establishment. And your own report concedes that tax-supported churches were "hallmarks of a religious establishment that the U.S. Constitution would later prohibit," even while recommending that public money now flow to religious institutions.

The Supreme Court upheld this understanding for a century and a half. In *Watson v. Jones* (1872), "The law knows no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the establishment of no sect"; in *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), which accepted Jefferson's Danbury letter "almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment"; in *Everson* (1947), where all nine justices, majority and dissenters alike, agreed the wall "must be kept high and impregnable"; and in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), which recalled that the Establishment Clause's "first and most immediate purpose rested on the belief that a union of government and religion tends to destroy government and to degrade religion." The report asks the executive branch to erase this inheritance by memo.

My church has stood at this crossroads before. In 1888, Senator Blair's bill would have made Sunday a national "day of rest and worship." Seventh-day Adventist Alonzo T. Jones testified against it before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor: "civil government is civil, and has nothing to do, in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way." Asked whether we sought an exemption for those who keep the seventh day, our people refused it: "An exemption clause is only a toleration clause in disguise... The vocabulary of American ideas knows no such word as 'toleration.' It asserts rights." Congress let the bill die. Yet in January of this year, the Heritage Foundation's Special Report No. 323 urged "Support for a Uniform Day of Rest" and the restoration of blue laws, resting on *McGowan v. Maryland* (1961), the same Sunday-law precedent your report cites approvingly, the case in which the lone dissenter, Justice Douglas, called it "a strange Bill of Rights that makes it possible for the dominant religious group to bring the minority to heel." Once the wall is reconceived as a bridge, a government-favored day of worship is not a paranoid fear; it is the only logical conclusion. And as Jones argued, if 999 of every 1,000 Americans kept the seventh day, they would still have no

right to compel the thousandth. Truth and duty to God are determined by an enlightened conscience bowing before the authority of the Word of God, never by a majority vote.

History teaches where the bridge leads, but it is not where the report assumes. When Constantine gave the church the favor of the state, beginning with his edict of March 7, A.D. 321 commanding rest on "the venerable day of the Sun," court bishops learned to flatter power, and within two generations the church was wielding the state: dissenters were branded madmen by imperial edict (A.D. 380), and by about A.D. 385 a Christian, Priscillian, was executed at the church's instigation. The union did not save Rome; the Western Empire collapsed within a century. The deeper danger has never been merely that the state will control the church, but that the church will control the state and wield it as a weapon against so-called heretics. Scripture's final warning is of exactly that (Revelation 17). A commission convinced that "church and state strengthen and support one another" should study what that support did to both.

For these reasons I respectfully request that the Commission:

1. withdraw Recommendation 1 and reaffirm, not reinterpret, the separation of church and state;
2. withdraw Recommendation 9 and instead request full enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, for a pulpit that may endorse candidates will soon be courted, then captured, by parties;
3. reject public funding of religious activity, for the state that funds the church will inspect, regulate, and instruct the church, and the state that today funds faiths you favor will tomorrow fund faiths you do not; and
4. extend the comment period, as fifteen days, scarcely announced, is inadequate for a draft of this length and consequence.

True faith cannot be compelled, purchased, or subsidized. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). The gospel calls; it does not compel. Keep the wall. It has protected the church far better than any bridge ever will.

With respect and sincerity,

Craig King

Athens, AL

Monday, July 13, 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 Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write today as a citizen of the United States of America who loves this country, and as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, to respectfully but firmly oppose the central thesis of the draft report: that the "wall of separation between church and state" is a modern myth to be replaced with a "bridge," and that "church and state strengthen and support one another" (Conclusion). I object in particular to Recommendation 1, which would have the Department of Justice redefine the Establishment Clause by executive guidance; to Recommendation 9, which would repeal the Johnson Amendment; and to the recommendations that would channel public funds to religious institutions and religious education. A fuller statement of the biblical, historical, and legal grounds for this opposition accompanies this summary.

Let me begin where I agree with you. No student should be punished for praying quietly. No soldier should be denied his turban, his kosher meals, or his Sabbath. No nurse should be coerced to violate her conscience, and no shelter should be forced to surrender the convictions that animate its mission. I stand also with the churches, schools, and ministries pressured by the state to abandon their biblical convictions regarding gender identity and sexuality, abortion, and the sanctity of human life. No institution should be compelled to renounce the teachings of Scripture as the price of serving its neighbors. These examples could be multiplied. The free exercise of religion deserves vigorous defense, and I commend the Commission for defending it. But the report draws the wrong lesson from these wrongs. The remedy for government hostility toward religion is a staunchly protected First Amendment, not government embrace and support of religion. Both roads, government hostility to religion and government support of religion, inevitably lead to the same error: man presuming authority in a realm that belongs exclusively to God.

The wall between church and state can be traced back 3,500 years to the Ten Commandments, spoken on Mount Sinai by God Himself and written with His own finger in tables of stone. The first table of the law comprises the whole of man's duty to God; the second table, the whole of man's duty to his fellow man. It is over the second table alone that civil government has any rightful jurisdiction. Christ affirmed that distinction: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). To civil government are entrusted civil things, the ordering of justice between man and man; God alone holds authority over worship, conscience, and the loyalty of the soul. Before Pilate He

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declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). The clearest demonstration of what happens when religious zeal borrows civil power is the crucifixion itself: religious leaders who lacked legal authority to execute obtained a civil sentence from a governor who found no fault in Him. From Christ, that principle has been carried by a long line of men and women who dared to speak and act their conscience: from Roger Williams, who in 1644, a century and a half before Jefferson, wrote of the “hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wildernes of the world,” to the persecuted Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut, to whom Jefferson addressed his famous letter. The wall was built by believers, for believers. Your report’s claim that it “only took off in the mid-twentieth century” is simply not historically factual.

The American experiment has succeeded, notwithstanding its flaws, precisely because of two liberties. Religious liberty: we have no established church and answer to no pope or prelate in matters of religion. Civil liberty: we are not governed by a king, but operate, at least in principle, as a nation of laws that apply equally to everyone, legislated by an elected body of representatives. Both liberties stem from the Protestant understanding of liberty: the repudiation of the idea that kings have a “divine right” to rule, or that a man should submit his conscience in matters of religion to another man, whether he be a priest, bishop, or pope. If every man may go to the Word of God to learn his duty and conscientiously live it out, then a more just system of government could be established, deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed: a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Madison, father of the Constitution, warned 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,” and testified that after “almost fifteen centuries” the fruits of legal establishment had been “pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.” As President he vetoed a bill merely incorporating an Episcopal church as exceeding “the essential distinction between Civil and Religious functions,” and explained that he had “always regarded the practical distinction between Religion and Civil Government as essential to the purity of both.” Washington assured the Baptists of Virginia that he would never have signed the Constitution had he thought it “might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical Society,” and told the Hebrew Congregation at Newport that this government “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance,” adding that in America “it is now no more that toleration is spoken of,” for religious liberty is an inherent natural right, not an indulgence. Franklin wrote that when a religion cannot support itself “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.” Jefferson’s Virginia Statute declared that “Almighty God hath created the mind free,” and that coercion in religion is “a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion.” The framers wrote a Constitution containing no religious test “ever” (Article VI) and a First Amendment forbidding establishment. And your own report concedes that tax-supported churches were “hallmarks of a religious establishment that the U.S. Constitution would later prohibit,” even while recommending that public money now flow to religious institutions.

The Supreme Court upheld this understanding for a century and a half. In *Watson v. Jones* (1872), “The law knows no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the

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establishment of no sect"; in *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), which accepted Jefferson's Danbury letter "almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment"; in *Everson* (1947), where all nine justices, majority and dissenters alike, agreed the wall "must be kept high and impregnable"; and in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), which recalled that the Establishment Clause's "first and most immediate purpose rested on the belief that a union of government and religion tends to destroy government and to degrade religion." The report asks the executive branch to erase this inheritance by memo.

My church has stood at this crossroads before. In 1888, Senator Blair's bill would have made Sunday a national "day of rest and worship." Seventh-day Adventist Alonzo T. Jones testified against it before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor: "civil government is civil, and has nothing to do, in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way." Asked whether we sought an exemption for those who keep the seventh day, our people refused it: "An exemption clause is only a toleration clause in disguise... The vocabulary of American ideas knows no such word as 'toleration.' It asserts rights." Congress let the bill die. Yet in January of this year, the Heritage Foundation's Special Report No. 323 urged "Support for a Uniform Day of Rest" and the restoration of blue laws, resting on *McGowan v. Maryland* (1961), the same Sunday-law precedent your report cites approvingly, the case in which the lone dissenter, Justice Douglas, called it "a strange Bill of Rights that makes it possible for the dominant religious group to bring the minority to heel." Once the wall is reconceived as a bridge, a government-favored day of worship is not a paranoid fear; it is the only logical conclusion. And as Jones argued, if 999 of every 1,000 Americans kept the seventh day, they would still have no right to compel the thousandth. Truth and duty to God are determined by an enlightened conscience bowing before the authority of the Word of God, never by a majority vote.

History teaches where the bridge leads, but it is not where the report assumes. When Constantine gave the church the favor of the state, beginning with his edict of March 7, A.D. 321 commanding rest on "the venerable day of the Sun," court bishops learned to flatter power, and within two generations the church was wielding the state: dissenters were branded madmen by imperial edict (A.D. 380), and by about A.D. 385 a Christian, Priscillian, was executed at the church's instigation. The union did not save Rome; the Western Empire collapsed within a century. The deeper danger has never been merely that the state will control the church, but that the church will control the state and wield it as a weapon against so-called heretics. Scripture's final warning is of exactly that (Revelation 17). A commission convinced that "church and state strengthen and support one another" should study what that support did to both.

For these reasons I respectfully request that the Commission:

1. withdraw Recommendation 1 and reaffirm, not reinterpret, the separation of church and state;
2. withdraw Recommendation 9 and instead request full enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, for a pulpit that may endorse candidates will soon be courted, then captured, by parties;

DOJ-RLC Comment-020562

3. reject public funding of religious activity, for the state that funds the church will inspect, regulate, and instruct the church, and the state that today funds faiths you favor will tomorrow fund faiths you do not; and

4. extend the comment period, as fifteen days, scarcely announced, is inadequate for a draft of this length and consequence.

True faith cannot be compelled, purchased, or subsidized. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). The gospel calls; it does not compel. Keep the wall. It has protected the church far better than any bridge ever will.

With respect and sincerity,

Craig King
Athens, AL

DOJ-RLC Comment-020563

PART II: COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE

Submitted in support of the foregoing comment

A. The Principle Is Christ's Own

The separation of church and state is a Bible doctrine before it is an American one, and it is older even than Christ's statement of it: the line is drawn in the Ten Commandments themselves. The first table of the law (the first four commandments) comprises the whole of man's duty to God: whom we worship, how we worship, the reverence of His name, and His day of rest. The second table (the last six) comprises the whole of man's duty to his fellow man; and it is over this second table alone that civil government has any rightful jurisdiction, punishing murder, theft, and false witness as offenses between man and man. When the Pharisees sought to entangle Him, Christ affirmed this very distinction: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

What belongs to Caesar? Taxes, tribute, custom, due honor, and lawful obedience to every ordinance of man (Romans 13:1–7; Titus 3:1–2; 1 Peter 2:13–17), so long as it does not conflict with what is due to God alone. And what belongs to God? Worship and reverence; the conscientious observance of a day of rest, though every man is left free to determine whether he will rest on the day God has blessed, honored, and sanctified, or follow the traditions of men; obedience to His commandments; and the good works of faith: the care of the sick, the poor, the outcast, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the oppressed. When the chief priests demanded that the apostles stop teaching in the name of Jesus, they answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Before Pilate, Christ declared, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36). Civil power cannot advance Christ's kingdom; every attempt to do so is a denial of Christ's own words.

The trial and crucifixion of Christ stand as the seminal demonstration of what happens when the church unites with the state. The religious leaders who condemned Him lacked civil authority to execute; they therefore brought Him to the Roman governor (John 18:28–31), who three times found no fault in Him yet yielded to religious pressure (John 19:12–16). Christ was condemned by the combined action of church and state. When religious authority employs civil power to enforce its will, the result is not righteousness but the violation of justice and the suppression of truth.

Because "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12), liberty of conscience is inviolable before the state. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15) is an invitation no statute may pre-empt. "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7): willing hearts, not coerced observance. Faith that must be legislated, funded, or favored into existence is not faith. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

B. The Witness of the Founders and Framers

DOJ-RLC Comment-020564

The draft report asserts the "wall of separation" idea "only took off in the mid-twentieth century." The record refutes this.

Roger Williams (1644), minister and founder of Rhode Island, wrote of the danger "when they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wildernes of the world" (*Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered*, London, 1644). The wall metaphor was born in the church, protecting the church, 158 years before Jefferson used it.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, drafted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (enacted 1786): "Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens... 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." As President, he wrote the Danbury Baptist Association (January 1, 1802) that the First Amendment built "a wall of separation between Church & State." The Danbury Baptists were not secularists; they were a religious minority suffering under Connecticut's established church, and the wall was written for their comfort.

James Madison, father of the Constitution, in his *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (1785): "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?" On the fruits of legal establishment, his verdict deserves quoting at length:

> *"Because experience witnesseth that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of Religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution. Enquire of the Teachers of Christianity for the ages in which it appeared in its greatest lustre; those of every sect, point to the ages prior to its incorporation with Civil policy." (Memorial, Art. 7)*

And of what establishments have done for the state: "In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the Civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny: in no instance have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people" (Art. 8). Madison also answered in advance the claim that religion needs the state's support: establishment "is a contradiction to the Christian Religion itself, for every page of it disavows a dependence on the powers of this world" (Art. 6). As President, on February 21, 1811, Madison vetoed a bill merely incorporating the Protestant Episcopal Church of Alexandria because it "exceeds the rightful authority, to which Governments are limited by the essential distinction between Civil and Religious functions." Explaining that veto to the Baptist churches of North Carolina (June 3, 1811), he wrote: "Having always regarded the practical distinction between Religion and Civil Government as essential to the purity of both, and as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, I could not have otherwise discharged my duty." In his later Detached Memoranda: "Strongly

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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."

George Washington, presiding officer of the Constitutional Convention, to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia (May 1789): "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"; and "every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience." And to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport (August 18, 1790), he wrote words that deserve quoting in full:

> *"The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."*

Benjamin Franklin, signer of both the Declaration and the Constitution, to Richard Price (October 9, 1780): "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 oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, 'tis a Sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."

The framers collectively wrote a Constitution that never mentions a deity in its operative text, and provided in Article VI that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." The word "ever" is theirs. The First Congress then wrote the Establishment Clause. And in 1797, the Senate approved by unanimous recorded vote, and President John Adams signed and proclaimed, the Treaty of Tripoli, whose English text as read and ratified declared that "the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion." Whatever the diplomatic circumstances, no senator rose to object to the words.

These are not the words of men who believed church and state should "strengthen and support one another" through funding, favor, and partnership. They are the words of men who had watched establishment corrupt religion for fifteen centuries and were determined to end the experiment.

C. The Judicial Record

For over a century the Supreme Court treated separation as the settled meaning of the First Amendment:

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- *Watson v. Jones*, 80 U.S. (13 Wall.) 679 (1872): "The law knows no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the establishment of no sect." Civil courts may not decide religious doctrine.
- *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145 (1879): Jefferson's Danbury letter, "coming as this does from an acknowledged leader of the advocates of the measure... may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment."
- *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943): "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."
- *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947): "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." The draft report attacks this decision by attacking its author; it omits that all nine justices in *Everson*, majority and dissenters, agreed on the principle. Justice Jackson, dissenting, wrote that "we have staked the very existence of our country on the faith that complete separation between the state and religion is best for the state and best for religion."
- *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488 (1961): Maryland could not require a notary public to declare belief in God; the Court reversed 9–0.
- *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962): The Establishment Clause's "first and most immediate purpose rested on the belief that a union of government and religion tends to destroy government and to degrade religion."

Against this line stands *McGowan v. Maryland*, 366 U.S. 420 (1961), the decision on which both the draft report (Ch. 1, n.12) and the Heritage Foundation's day-of-rest proposal rely. There the Court upheld Sunday closing laws 8–1 by relabeling them secular: their "present purpose and effect... is to provide a uniform day of rest for all citizens," and the fact that the day is the majority's holy day "does not bar the State from achieving its secular goals." In the companion case *Braunfeld v. Brown*, Orthodox Jewish merchants who closed Saturdays for their Sabbath were compelled to close Sundays as well: a two-day penalty for keeping the fourth commandment as written. Justice Douglas, alone in dissent, saw it plainly: "it is a strange Bill of Rights that makes it possible for the dominant religious group to bring the minority to heel because the minority, in the doing of acts which intrinsically are wholesome and not antisocial, does not defer to the majority's religious beliefs." *McGowan* is the standing legal machinery by which religious observance can be enforced under a secular label. That the report cites it approvingly, while the Heritage Foundation builds upon it a call for restored blue laws, tells Sabbath-keepers everything we need to know about where the "bridge" leads.

D. The Lessons of History and of Prophecy

The report assumes that closer union will strengthen both church and state. History records the opposite, and the pattern begins precisely where the Sunday-law tradition begins.

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On March 7, A.D. 321, Constantine decreed: “On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed” (Codex Justinianus 3.12.3). It was the first civil Sunday law, the fountainhead of every Sunday statute since, including those *McGowan* upheld. With imperial favor came imperial money, imperial buildings, and imperial politics. Court bishops such as Eusebius of Caesarea learned to flatter the throne; the church learned to reach for the sword it had once suffered under. Within sixty years the Edict of Thessalonica (A.D. 380) made one confession the official religion of the empire and branded all dissenters “foolish madmen.” Within five more years, Priscillian of Ávila and six companions were executed at Trier (c. A.D. 385), commonly cited as the first Christians put to death for heresy under a Christian state, over the protest of Ambrose of Milan and Martin of Tours, who saw where it must lead. It led to a millennium of coerced conformity, inquisition, and religious war.

And what did this union do for the state? It did not save Rome. The Western Empire, having married the church, collapsed within a century of Theodosius’s edict. The church, having married the empire, was corrupted into an institution that made emperors kneel and kindled the fires of persecution. Madison’s summary stands: fifteen centuries on trial, and the fruits were “pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.”

Here a common assumption must be corrected, one the report shares. The danger is imagined chiefly as the state controlling the church. But the record of history, and the testimony of Scripture, point the other way: given a bridge, the church walks across it and mounts the state. Rome’s bishops did not end as servants of the emperors; the emperors ended as servants of the bishops. Scripture’s final warning pictures exactly this: not a beast devouring a woman, but “a woman sit[ting] upon a scarlet coloured beast”: the church riding, guiding, and spurring the civil power (Revelation 17:3). Many of the Reformers and the founders of America’s Protestant denominations read that prophecy as the history of the union of church and state, written in advance. A commission composed of religious leaders proposing to bridge church and state should ponder that the entity prophecy holds responsible for the persecutions of history is not the beast alone, but the woman who rides it. It is precisely because we love the church that we would keep her off that saddle.

E. The American Test Case: 1888

This nation has already faced the question the Heritage Foundation now reopens. In 1888, Senator H.W. Blair introduced S. 2983, “A bill to secure to the people the enjoyment of the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord’s day, as a day of rest, and to promote its observance as a day of religious worship.” On December 13, 1888, Alonzo T. Jones, a Seventh-day Adventist, testified against it before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor. His argument (published as *The National Sunday Law*, 1889) remains the definitive American statement of the principle:

- “The principle upon which we stand is that civil government is civil, and has nothing to do, in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way. The basis of this is found in the words of Jesus Christ in Matt. 22:21.”

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- “When Caesar — civil government — exacts of men that which is God’s, he demands what does not belong to him; in so doing Caesar usurps the place and the prerogative of God.”
- “It is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion.”
- The state may punish incivility, never irreligion: “The sole question must ever be, Is the action civil or uncivil.”
- On majorities: if 999 of every 1,000 Americans kept the seventh day, “they would have no right to compel me to rest on Saturday.” Truth and duty to God are determined by an enlightened conscience bowing before the authority of the Word of God, never by a majority vote.
- And lest anyone suspect special pleading: “We are Seventh-day Adventists; but if this bill were in favor of enforcing the observance of the seventh day as the Lord’s day, we would oppose it just as much as we oppose it as it is now.”

Offered an exemption clause for seventh-day observers, our forebears refused it: “An exemption clause is only a toleration clause in disguise... The vocabulary of American ideas knows no such word as ‘toleration.’ It asserts rights.” Congress let the Blair bill die with the Fiftieth Congress, and the Republic was the better for it. The same arguments answer the same proposal today, whether it arrives as a national statute or as “restored” state blue laws blessed by federal policy.

F. Application to the Draft Report

1. **Recommendation 1 (DOJ “guidance” on the Establishment Clause).** The meaning of the First Amendment is not the executive branch’s to assign by memorandum. The report’s supporting narrative is faulty history: the wall predates Jefferson (Williams, 1644), Jefferson’s letter was addressed to persecuted believers, and the Court invoked it as early as 1879 (*Reynolds*), not the mid-twentieth century. I further note that where the Executive Summary states the government “may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance,” Chapter 2’s restatement quietly drops “prefer one religion over another.” That omission is the whole controversy in miniature, and it should be restored.
2. **Recommendation 9 (repeal of the Johnson Amendment).** A pulpit that may endorse candidates will soon be courted, then captured, by parties; tax-deductible dollars will flow through churches into campaigns. This politicizes the church far more surely than any regulation it removes. Enforce the Johnson Amendment; do not repeal it.
3. **Funding recommendations.** Government money is never free. The state that funds the church will audit, condition, and eventually instruct the church, and the administration that funds faiths you favor will be succeeded by one that funds faiths you do not. Franklin said all that needs saying: a religion obliged to call for the help of the civil power confesses its own weakness.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020569

4. **The trajectory.** The report should expressly disclaim any federal or federally-encouraged "uniform day of rest," and decline to rest any part of its reasoning on *McGowan v. Maryland*. If the Commission does not intend that road, it costs nothing to say so; if it does, the country deserves to hear it plainly.

5. **Process.** A fifteen-day, scarcely-publicized comment window on a draft of this length, whose operative detail sits in an appendix, is inadequate to the gravity of what is proposed. I respectfully request an extension and wider notice.

G. Conclusion

While individuals of my faith may serve in governmental or advisory roles, no group of individuals represents the whole body of the church, and any position supporting a union of church and state does not reflect our beliefs or the historic teaching of our faith. We remain open to constructive dialogue and would welcome the opportunity to share further the biblical, historical, and constitutional foundations of these convictions.

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man" (Psalm 118:8). The wall of separation was Christ's principle before it was Jefferson's metaphor; it was carried by Williams and the Baptists, written into law by Madison and Jefferson, signed by Washington, defended before the Senate by my own church's pioneers, and upheld by the Supreme Court for a century. It protects the church from the state, the state from the church, and the conscience from both. Keep the wall.

Respectfully submitted,

Craig King
Athens, AL

Sources: RLC Draft Report (Exec. Summary, Conclusion, Recs. 1 & 9, Chs. 1–2); A.T. Jones, "The National Sunday Law" (Pacific Press, 1889) (testimony of Dec. 13, 1888 on S. 2983, 50th Cong.; official transcript at Misc. Doc. No. 43, 50th Cong., 2d Sess., pp. 73–102); Heritage Foundation Special Report No. 323, "Saving America by Saving the Family" (Jan. 8, 2026), § "Support for a Uniform Day of Rest"; R. Williams, "Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered" (1644); Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786); Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Assn. (Jan. 1, 1802); Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance" (1785), Veto Message (Feb. 21, 1811), Letter to the Baptist Churches of North Carolina (June 3, 1811), Detached Memoranda (ca. 1817); Washington to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia (May 1789) and to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport (Aug. 18, 1790); Franklin to Richard Price (Oct. 9, 1780); Treaty of Tripoli, art. 11 (1797); U.S. Const. art. VI; Watson v. Jones, 80 U.S. 679 (1872); Reynolds v. United States, 98 U.S. 145 (1879); W. Va. Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette, 319 U.S. 624 (1943); Everson v. Bd. of Ed., 330 U.S. 1 (1947); Torcaso v. Watkins, 367 U.S. 488 (1961); McGowan v. Maryland, 366 U.S. 420 (1961); Braunfeld v. Brown, 366 U.S. 599 (1961); Engel v. Vitale, 370 U.S. 421 (1962); Codex Justinianus 3.12.3 (Schaff trans.); Codex Theodosianus 16.1.2 (Edict of Thessalonica, A.D. 380).

DOJ-RLC Comment-020570

From: Jace Addison <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment on the Draft Report of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:52:36 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13, 2026

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

After reviewing the newly released draft report from the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission, I would like to submit the following feedback regarding the document's objectives, strengths, and structural risks. While I originally approached the text with less skepticism, further reflection from a libertarian-leaning perspective highlights a few critical issues that must be addressed before this report is finalized.

I. Navigating the Church-State Tightrope

Neither "side" of the current church-state debate is without its distinct dangers. It is undeniable that a hostile approach to religion from the secular government has frequently deprived individuals of their religious liberty in recent years. This overreach stems directly from an overemphasis on the "wall of separation" to the complete exclusion of individual liberty.

However, we must also recognize the very real danger of a state-endorsed religion that could result from the report's proposed "bridge" framework.

There is no single "right answer" to this historic tension. Walking this tightrope requires continuous correction. In this current cultural moment, the primary focus must be on protecting individual liberty from the infringements of the past few decades. We must accept that these corrections will naturally trigger overcorrections that will later need to be adjusted. The cycle will continue, but the immediate defense of personal conscience is paramount.

II. Free Speech and the Marketplace of the Pulpit

As a firm believer in free speech and the public exercise of religion, I believe the report's focus on the Johnson Amendment highlights a significant constitutional double burden. While the amendment accomplishes some institutional good, it does so at the absolute expense of radical freedom of speech.

If pastors wish to engage in the patronage of political candidates, they should have the legal right to do so—a reality that is already occurring in some measure despite current restrictions. From my perspective, federal enforcement has resulted in the censorship of conservative religious voices far more than liberal-supporting clergy.

A free-market approach to this issue dictates the following:

- **The Right to Speak:** If a pastor wants to sell themselves out to a political agenda, the state should not censor them.
- **Institutional Accountability:** The pastor's employer (the church conference or board) should maintain the absolute right to terminate them for receiving political funds.
- **The Discernment of the Pews:** Congregations will ultimately vote with their feet. If churchgoers sense that a pastor is prostituting themselves to a political agenda for money, they will leave that church. This will naturally lessen the pastor's influence to the point where they are no longer worth buying.

While online echo chambers may allow a few of these compromised pastors to maintain insulated, fervent followings, freedom of speech must be preserved regardless. In this information age, the freedom to receive funds to push a political agenda will ultimately give Christian Nationalists enough rope to hang themselves in the court of public opinion.

III. Educational Freedom: Tax Credits vs. Vouchers

The public school system currently operates as a government monopoly, which has ironically contributed to the overall decline in public education. While the report's proposed voucher system allows parents the freedom to choose what is best for their children and let funding follow their beliefs, it is imperfect from a pure libertarian perspective.

Allowing parents financial freedom to choose schools that model their beliefs will foster healthy competition and educational improvements. If a school engages in empty indoctrination without true teaching, it should be up to the parents to remove their children or allow them to suffer the results of a poor education. For the most part, a choice-driven market will yield positive results, especially for robust systems like the Seventh-day Adventist education network.

However, the voucher system has a profound structural weakness: **government strings are exceptionally hard to detach once public money is involved.** While the current administration may promise not to infringe upon what private schools can offer, there is zero guarantee that future administrations will maintain that restraint. Vouchers carry a heavy risk of future government censorship and regulation.

The Better Alternative: Tuition Tax Credits

To achieve the Commission's goals without expanding state oversight, **a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for parents** is vastly superior to a voucher system. Allowing parents to offset their tax liability directly preserves private wealth rather than having the government collect and doll out money based on its own criteria. I strongly urge the Commission to substitute the voucher recommendations with universal tuition tax credits.

IV. The Danger of the "Bridge" Metaphor

Finally, I strongly object to the report's rhetorical choice to call for a "bridge" instead of a "wall". After examining the text, it appears this analogy was a poorly chosen rhetorical reaction designed to push back against the abuse of the separation of church and state, rather than a literal attempt to institute an official state religion.

Nonetheless, metaphors matter in public policy. The Commission must recognize that this framework risks serving as a dangerous stepping stone toward general Christian sponsorship where the state officially backs generalized Christian doctrines—an outcome that would be fundamentally detrimental to our republic's freedoms.

Thank you for your time, your consideration of these adjustments, and your ongoing work to secure the core free exercise rights of the American people.

Sincerely,

Jace Addison

From: Christopher Borcherding <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public comment - Separation of Church and State draft
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 17:59:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

Greetings,

I am writing in response to the draft regarding tearing down the wall of separation between church and state. This separation is not a modern construct as some are suggesting, but predates this great nation beginning with the founding of Rhode Island. We should not be allowing church and state to unite in this country that from its founding has kept them separate.

As a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian I believe with all my heart that in order to have love there needs to be a freedom to choose who and what we believe. The Bible specifically States several times in the New testament that God is love!

Jesus, as He walked this fallen planet 2,000 years ago never forced his teachings upon anyone. He publicly opened the scriptures to whoever would listen and, though everything He said by definition is Truth, He allowed people to accept or walk away. He never pushed or encouraged Force but rather told his disciples that if others did not accept their message they were to kick the dust off their feet and move along. He also specifically stated that we are to give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's clearly differentiated between the two, government and church.

I love my Lord and Savior Jesus, the God of the universe, with all my heart. And though I wish everyone else would love him the same and seek to do things according to His Word, I do not believe that the conscience can ever be forced or that it is right to try to.

In a country as great as ours, built on freedom of conscience despite all that our forefathers fled from, specifically political and religious tyranny, I do not agree with this push in state and federal government to seek out and then emphasize in law the opinions of specific religious leaders and organizations above those of the common people, especially it matters of conscience.

Again, though I do wish the Bible was the standard for American law, to push issues of faith is neither safe nor just. For example, I believe we can hold to and enshrine in law the last six commandments of God's decalog, but the first four, having specifically to do with man's relationship with God, cannot be enforced in a non-theocratic nation. Jesus is to be king in each of our hearts but as he said to Pontius Pilate, His kingdom is not of this world, at least not until his second coming.

Many hold to the belief that this is a Christian nation and therefore it can be ruled as such, but there is a reason there are more than 10,000 denominations in this country. Obviously not everyone interprets the Bible the same. Clearly there is erroneous interpretation as well as good interpretation and it is not the government's place to choose which to listen to. It is up to "We the people" to seek God as individuals and then make our voices known at the voting booth. And both we the people and our elected leaders are to be governed and held in check by our constitution.

Unfortunately, we have seen in your own commission the results of treading this path toward unification of church and state, even the idea of church over state. I may not agree with the commissioner woman and some of her views, but the fact that she was cut off, kicked out and not allowed to continue to share her thoughts concerns and beliefs because they go contrary to those of others on the committee shows the path that is being tread and leads me to believe that it will only get worse from here.

It sounds nice to say that the church may have influence on the government but the government will not be able to have influence on the church, however anyone taking a moment to consider will realize that thought is wishful dreaming and will not last long. The government will have to choose which religious doctrine to use and thus will go contrary to the beliefs of anyone that does not stand with that specific teaching. I have listened to enough interviews with certain outspoken religious and political leaders in regards to their views on blue laws, blasphemy laws, etc to realize that their interpretations of the scripture are often different to mine or those of friends from other denominations. It is far to easy to push personal opinion or biased interpretation rather than a holistic review of God's word. None of us is immune.

On a personal note, in the history of my own family I have been told of how only a few generations back on my mother's side we have family members who were lined up against a barn and shot for their Catholic faith. And on my father's side I know historically that those who would later be known as lutherans in Germany were heavily persecuted before and after Luther took his stand. On both sides, were they Catholic or Protestant, they were persecuted and killed by the government at the direction of a church or an atheistic regime for holding to their conscientiously held the lease. As an aside,I do agree that atheism is faith-based and acts as a religion.

I do not think that it is constitutional for the government to take a stand on either side, but that in a truly free nation, with liberty of conscience and justice for ALL, our government must uphold our right to believe as we are convicted and act on that belief so long as doing so does not specifically take away the rights of others to pursue life, liberty, and happiness as was declared by our forefathers 250 years ago and enshrined in our Constitution and its amendments.

Thank you for thoughtfully considering the various comments you are receiving. I beg you to step back from personal opinion and even your own heartfelt conviction for a moment to consider the thoughts and concerns of your fellow countrymen in light of our nation's founding documents.

God bless you as far as you walk according to His Word and the constraints of the constitution of these United States of America. In God we trust!

Sincerely,
Chris Borcherding
Minnesota, USA

From: Craig King <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – Craig King
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:00:34 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: RLC_Public_Comment_-_Craig_King_-_2026-07-13.pdf

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Monday, July 13, 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

[PDF with letter and support attached.]

Re: Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write today as a citizen of the United States of America who loves this country, and as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, to respectfully but firmly oppose the central thesis of the draft report: that the “wall of separation between church and state” is a modern myth to be replaced with a “bridge,” and that “church and state strengthen and support one another” (Conclusion). I object in particular to Recommendation 1, which would have the Department of Justice redefine the Establishment Clause by executive guidance; to Recommendation 9, which would repeal the Johnson Amendment; and to the recommendations that would channel public funds to religious institutions and religious education. A fuller statement of the biblical, historical, and legal grounds for this opposition accompanies this summary.

Let me begin where I agree with you. No student should be punished for praying quietly. No soldier should be denied his turban, his kosher meals, or his Sabbath. No nurse should be coerced to violate her conscience, and no shelter should be forced to surrender the convictions that animate its mission. I stand also with the churches, schools, and ministries pressured by the state to abandon their biblical convictions regarding gender identity and sexuality, abortion, and the sanctity of human life. No institution should be compelled to renounce the teachings of Scripture as the price of serving its neighbors. These examples could be multiplied. The free exercise of religion deserves vigorous defense, and I commend the Commission for defending it. But the report draws the wrong lesson from these wrongs. The remedy for government hostility toward religion is a staunchly protected First Amendment, not government embrace and support of religion. Both roads, government hostility to religion and government support of religion, inevitably lead to the same error: man presuming authority in a realm that belongs exclusively to God.

The wall between church and state can be traced back 3,500 years to the Ten Commandments, spoken on Mount Sinai by God Himself and written with His own finger in tables of stone. The first table of the law comprises the whole of man's duty to God; the second table, the whole of man's duty to his fellow man. It is over the second table alone that civil government has any rightful jurisdiction. Christ affirmed that distinction: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). To civil government are entrusted civil things, the ordering of justice between man and man; God alone holds authority over worship, conscience, and the loyalty of the soul. Before Pilate He declared, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The clearest demonstration of what happens when religious zeal borrows civil power is the crucifixion itself: religious leaders who lacked legal authority to execute obtained a civil sentence from a governor who found no fault in Him. From Christ, that principle has been carried by a long line of men and women who dared to speak and act their conscience: from Roger Williams, who in 1644, a century and a half before Jefferson, wrote of the "hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wildernes of the world," to the persecuted Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut, to whom Jefferson addressed his famous letter. The wall was built by believers, for believers. Your report's claim that it "only took off in the mid-twentieth century" is simply not historically factual.

The American experiment has succeeded, notwithstanding its flaws, precisely because of two liberties. Religious liberty: we have no established church and answer to no pope or prelate in matters of religion. Civil liberty: we are not governed by a king, but operate, at least in principle, as a nation of laws that apply equally to everyone, legislated by an elected body of representatives. Both liberties stem from the Protestant understanding of liberty: the repudiation of the idea that kings have a "divine right" to rule, or that a man should submit his conscience in matters of religion to another man, whether he be a priest, bishop, or pope. If every man may go to the Word of God to learn his duty and conscientiously live it out, then a more just system of government could be established, deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed: a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Madison, father of the Constitution, warned 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," and testified that after "almost fifteen centuries" the fruits of legal establishment had been "pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution." As President he vetoed a bill merely incorporating an Episcopal church as exceeding "the essential distinction between Civil and Religious functions," and explained that he had "always regarded the practical distinction between Religion and Civil Government as essential to the purity of both." Washington assured the Baptists of Virginia that he would never have signed the Constitution had he thought it "might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical Society," and told the Hebrew Congregation at Newport that this government "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance," adding that in America "it is now no more that toleration is spoken of," for religious liberty is an inherent natural right, not an indulgence. Franklin wrote that when a religion cannot support itself "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." Jefferson's Virginia Statute declared that "Almighty God hath created the mind free," and that coercion in religion is "a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion." The framers wrote a Constitution containing no religious test "ever" (Article VI) and a First Amendment forbidding establishment. And your own report concedes that tax-supported churches were "hallmarks of a religious establishment that the U.S. Constitution would later prohibit," even while recommending that public money now flow to religious institutions.

The Supreme Court upheld this understanding for a century and a half. In *Watson v. Jones* (1872), "The law knows no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the establishment of no sect"; in *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), which accepted Jefferson's Danbury letter "almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment"; in *Everson* (1947), where all nine justices, majority and dissenters alike, agreed the wall "must be kept high and impregnable"; and in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), which recalled that the Establishment Clause's "first and most immediate purpose rested on the belief that a union of government and religion tends to destroy government and to degrade religion." The report asks the executive branch to erase this inheritance by memo.

My church has stood at this crossroads before. In 1888, Senator Blair's bill would have made Sunday a national "day of rest and worship." Seventh-day Adventist Alonzo T. Jones testified against it before the Senate

Committee on Education and Labor: “civil government is civil, and has nothing to do, in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way.” Asked whether we sought an exemption for those who keep the seventh day, our people refused it: “An exemption clause is only a toleration clause in disguise... The vocabulary of American ideas knows no such word as ‘toleration.’ It asserts rights.” Congress let the bill die. Yet in January of this year, the Heritage Foundation’s Special Report No. 323 urged “Support for a Uniform Day of Rest” and the restoration of blue laws, resting on *McGowan v. Maryland* (1961), the same Sunday-law precedent your report cites approvingly, the case in which the lone dissenter, Justice Douglas, called it “a strange Bill of Rights that makes it possible for the dominant religious group to bring the minority to heel.” Once the wall is reconceived as a bridge, a government-favored day of worship is not a paranoid fear; it is the only logical conclusion. And as Jones argued, if 999 of every 1,000 Americans kept the seventh day, they would still have no right to compel the thousandth. Truth and duty to God are determined by an enlightened conscience bowing before the authority of the Word of God, never by a majority vote.

History teaches where the bridge leads, but it is not where the report assumes. When Constantine gave the church the favor of the state, beginning with his edict of March 7, A.D. 321 commanding rest on “the venerable day of the Sun,” court bishops learned to flatter power, and within two generations the church was wielding the state: dissenters were branded madmen by imperial edict (A.D. 380), and by about A.D. 385 a Christian, Priscillian, was executed at the church’s instigation. The union did not save Rome; the Western Empire collapsed within a century. The deeper danger has never been merely that the state will control the church, but that the church will control the state and wield it as a weapon against so-called heretics. Scripture’s final warning is of exactly that (Revelation 17). A commission convinced that “church and state strengthen and support one another” should study what that support did to both.

For these reasons I respectfully request that the Commission:

1. withdraw Recommendation 1 and reaffirm, not reinterpret, the separation of church and state;
2. withdraw Recommendation 9 and instead request full enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, for a pulpit that may endorse candidates will soon be courted, then captured, by parties;
3. reject public funding of religious activity, for the state that funds the church will inspect, regulate, and instruct the church, and the state that today funds faiths you favor will tomorrow fund faiths you do not; and
4. extend the comment period, as fifteen days, scarcely announced, is inadequate for a draft of this length and consequence.

True faith cannot be compelled, purchased, or subsidized. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). The gospel calls; it does not compel. Keep the wall. It has protected the church far better than any bridge ever will.

With respect and sincerity,

Craig King

Athens, AL

Monday, July 13, 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

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DOJ-RLC Comment-020578

declared, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). The clearest demonstration of what happens when religious zeal borrows civil power is the crucifixion itself: religious leaders who lacked legal authority to execute obtained a civil sentence from a governor who found no fault in Him. From Christ, that principle has been carried by a long line of men and women who dared to speak and act their conscience: from Roger Williams, who in 1644, a century and a half before Jefferson, wrote of the “hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wildernes of the world,” to the persecuted Baptists of Danbury, Connecticut, to whom Jefferson addressed his famous letter. The wall was built by believers, for believers. Your report’s claim that it “only took off in the mid-twentieth century” is simply not historically factual.

The American experiment has succeeded, notwithstanding its flaws, precisely because of two liberties. Religious liberty: we have no established church and answer to no pope or prelate in matters of religion. Civil liberty: we are not governed by a king, but operate, at least in principle, as a nation of laws that apply equally to everyone, legislated by an elected body of representatives. Both liberties stem from the Protestant understanding of liberty: the repudiation of the idea that kings have a “divine right” to rule, or that a man should submit his conscience in matters of religion to another man, whether he be a priest, bishop, or pope. If every man may go to the Word of God to learn his duty and conscientiously live it out, then a more just system of government could be established, deriving its just powers from the consent of the governed: a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Madison, father of the Constitution, warned 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,” and testified that after “almost fifteen centuries” the fruits of legal establishment had been “pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.” As President he vetoed a bill merely incorporating an Episcopal church as exceeding “the essential distinction between Civil and Religious functions,” and explained that he had “always regarded the practical distinction between Religion and Civil Government as essential to the purity of both.” Washington assured the Baptists of Virginia that he would never have signed the Constitution had he thought it “might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical Society,” and told the Hebrew Congregation at Newport that this government “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance,” adding that in America “it is now no more that toleration is spoken of,” for religious liberty is an inherent natural right, not an indulgence. Franklin wrote that when a religion cannot support itself “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.” Jefferson’s Virginia Statute declared that “Almighty God hath created the mind free,” and that coercion in religion is “a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion.” The framers wrote a Constitution containing no religious test “ever” (Article VI) and a First Amendment forbidding establishment. And your own report concedes that tax-supported churches were “hallmarks of a religious establishment that the U.S. Constitution would later prohibit,” even while recommending that public money now flow to religious institutions.

The Supreme Court upheld this understanding for a century and a half. In *Watson v. Jones* (1872), “The law knows no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the

DOJ-RLC Comment-020579

establishment of no sect"; in *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), which accepted Jefferson's Danbury letter "almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment"; in *Everson* (1947), where all nine justices, majority and dissenters alike, agreed the wall "must be kept high and impregnable"; and in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), which recalled that the Establishment Clause's "first and most immediate purpose rested on the belief that a union of government and religion tends to destroy government and to degrade religion." The report asks the executive branch to erase this inheritance by memo.

My church has stood at this crossroads before. In 1888, Senator Blair's bill would have made Sunday a national "day of rest and worship." Seventh-day Adventist Alonzo T. Jones testified against it before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor: "civil government is civil, and has nothing to do, in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way." Asked whether we sought an exemption for those who keep the seventh day, our people refused it: "An exemption clause is only a toleration clause in disguise... The vocabulary of American ideas knows no such word as 'toleration.' It asserts rights." Congress let the bill die. Yet in January of this year, the Heritage Foundation's Special Report No. 323 urged "Support for a Uniform Day of Rest" and the restoration of blue laws, resting on *McGowan v. Maryland* (1961), the same Sunday-law precedent your report cites approvingly, the case in which the lone dissenter, Justice Douglas, called it "a strange Bill of Rights that makes it possible for the dominant religious group to bring the minority to heel." Once the wall is reconceived as a bridge, a government-favored day of worship is not a paranoid fear; it is the only logical conclusion. And as Jones argued, if 999 of every 1,000 Americans kept the seventh day, they would still have no right to compel the thousandth. Truth and duty to God are determined by an enlightened conscience bowing before the authority of the Word of God, never by a majority vote.

History teaches where the bridge leads, but it is not where the report assumes. When Constantine gave the church the favor of the state, beginning with his edict of March 7, A.D. 321 commanding rest on "the venerable day of the Sun," court bishops learned to flatter power, and within two generations the church was wielding the state: dissenters were branded madmen by imperial edict (A.D. 380), and by about A.D. 385 a Christian, Priscillian, was executed at the church's instigation. The union did not save Rome; the Western Empire collapsed within a century. The deeper danger has never been merely that the state will control the church, but that the church will control the state and wield it as a weapon against so-called heretics. Scripture's final warning is of exactly that (Revelation 17). A commission convinced that "church and state strengthen and support one another" should study what that support did to both.

For these reasons I respectfully request that the Commission:

1. withdraw Recommendation 1 and reaffirm, not reinterpret, the separation of church and state;
2. withdraw Recommendation 9 and instead request full enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, for a pulpit that may endorse candidates will soon be courted, then captured, by parties;

DOJ-RLC Comment-020580

3. reject public funding of religious activity, for the state that funds the church will inspect, regulate, and instruct the church, and the state that today funds faiths you favor will tomorrow fund faiths you do not; and

4. extend the comment period, as fifteen days, scarcely announced, is inadequate for a draft of this length and consequence.

True faith cannot be compelled, purchased, or subsidized. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6). The gospel calls; it does not compel. Keep the wall. It has protected the church far better than any bridge ever will.

With respect and sincerity,

Craig King
Athens, AL

DOJ-RLC Comment-020581

PART II: COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE

Submitted in support of the foregoing comment

A. The Principle Is Christ's Own

The separation of church and state is a Bible doctrine before it is an American one, and it is older even than Christ's statement of it: the line is drawn in the Ten Commandments themselves. The first table of the law (the first four commandments) comprises the whole of man's duty to God: whom we worship, how we worship, the reverence of His name, and His day of rest. The second table (the last six) comprises the whole of man's duty to his fellow man; and it is over this second table alone that civil government has any rightful jurisdiction, punishing murder, theft, and false witness as offenses between man and man. When the Pharisees sought to entangle Him, Christ affirmed this very distinction: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

What belongs to Caesar? Taxes, tribute, custom, due honor, and lawful obedience to every ordinance of man (Romans 13:1–7; Titus 3:1–2; 1 Peter 2:13–17), so long as it does not conflict with what is due to God alone. And what belongs to God? Worship and reverence; the conscientious observance of a day of rest, though every man is left free to determine whether he will rest on the day God has blessed, honored, and sanctified, or follow the traditions of men; obedience to His commandments; and the good works of faith: the care of the sick, the poor, the outcast, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the oppressed. When the chief priests demanded that the apostles stop teaching in the name of Jesus, they answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Before Pilate, Christ declared, "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight" (John 18:36). Civil power cannot advance Christ's kingdom; every attempt to do so is a denial of Christ's own words.

The trial and crucifixion of Christ stand as the seminal demonstration of what happens when the church unites with the state. The religious leaders who condemned Him lacked civil authority to execute; they therefore brought Him to the Roman governor (John 18:28–31), who three times found no fault in Him yet yielded to religious pressure (John 19:12–16). Christ was condemned by the combined action of church and state. When religious authority employs civil power to enforce its will, the result is not righteousness but the violation of justice and the suppression of truth.

Because "every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12), liberty of conscience is inviolable before the state. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15) is an invitation no statute may pre-empt. "God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7): willing hearts, not coerced observance. Faith that must be legislated, funded, or favored into existence is not faith. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

B. The Witness of the Founders and Framers

DOJ-RLC Comment-020582

The draft report asserts the "wall of separation" idea "only took off in the mid-twentieth century." The record refutes this.

Roger Williams (1644), minister and founder of Rhode Island, wrote of the danger "when they have opened a gap in the hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wildernes of the world" (*Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered*, London, 1644). The wall metaphor was born in the church, protecting the church, 158 years before Jefferson used it.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, drafted the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (enacted 1786): "Almighty God hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments or burthens... 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." As President, he wrote the Danbury Baptist Association (January 1, 1802) that the First Amendment built "a wall of separation between Church & State." The Danbury Baptists were not secularists; they were a religious minority suffering under Connecticut's established church, and the wall was written for their comfort.

James Madison, father of the Constitution, in his *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments* (1785): "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?" On the fruits of legal establishment, his verdict deserves quoting at length:

> *"Because experience witnesseth that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of Religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution. Enquire of the Teachers of Christianity for the ages in which it appeared in its greatest lustre; those of every sect, point to the ages prior to its incorporation with Civil policy." (Memorial, Art. 7)*

And of what establishments have done for the state: "In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the Civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny: in no instance have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people" (Art. 8). Madison also answered in advance the claim that religion needs the state's support: establishment "is a contradiction to the Christian Religion itself, for every page of it disavows a dependence on the powers of this world" (Art. 6). As President, on February 21, 1811, Madison vetoed a bill merely incorporating the Protestant Episcopal Church of Alexandria because it "exceeds the rightful authority, to which Governments are limited by the essential distinction between Civil and Religious functions." Explaining that veto to the Baptist churches of North Carolina (June 3, 1811), he wrote: "Having always regarded the practical distinction between Religion and Civil Government as essential to the purity of both, and as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, I could not have otherwise discharged my duty." In his later Detached Memoranda: "Strongly

DOJ-RLC Comment-020583

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."

George Washington, presiding officer of the Constitutional Convention, to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia (May 1789): "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"; and "every man, conducting himself as a good citizen, and being accountable to God alone for his religious opinions, ought to be protected in worshipping the Deity according to the dictates of his own conscience." And to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport (August 18, 1790), he wrote words that deserve quoting in full:

> *"The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."*

Benjamin Franklin, signer of both the Declaration and the Constitution, to Richard Price (October 9, 1780): "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 oblig'd to call for the help of the Civil Power, 'tis a Sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."

The framers collectively wrote a Constitution that never mentions a deity in its operative text, and provided in Article VI that "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." The word "ever" is theirs. The First Congress then wrote the Establishment Clause. And in 1797, the Senate approved by unanimous recorded vote, and President John Adams signed and proclaimed, the Treaty of Tripoli, whose English text as read and ratified declared that "the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion." Whatever the diplomatic circumstances, no senator rose to object to the words.

These are not the words of men who believed church and state should "strengthen and support one another" through funding, favor, and partnership. They are the words of men who had watched establishment corrupt religion for fifteen centuries and were determined to end the experiment.

C. The Judicial Record

For over a century the Supreme Court treated separation as the settled meaning of the First Amendment:

DOJ-RLC Comment-020584

- *Watson v. Jones*, 80 U.S. (13 Wall.) 679 (1872): “The law knows no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the establishment of no sect.” Civil courts may not decide religious doctrine.
- *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145 (1879): Jefferson’s Danbury letter, “coming as this does from an acknowledged leader of the advocates of the measure... may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effect of the amendment.”
- *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943): “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.”
- *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947): “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.” The draft report attacks this decision by attacking its author; it omits that all nine justices in *Everson*, majority and dissenters, agreed on the principle. Justice Jackson, dissenting, wrote that “we have staked the very existence of our country on the faith that complete separation between the state and religion is best for the state and best for religion.”
- *Torcaso v. Watkins*, 367 U.S. 488 (1961): Maryland could not require a notary public to declare belief in God; the Court reversed 9–0.
- *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962): The Establishment Clause’s “first and most immediate purpose rested on the belief that a union of government and religion tends to destroy government and to degrade religion.”

Against this line stands *McGowan v. Maryland*, 366 U.S. 420 (1961), the decision on which both the draft report (Ch. 1, n.12) and the Heritage Foundation’s day-of-rest proposal rely. There the Court upheld Sunday closing laws 8–1 by relabeling them secular: their “present purpose and effect... is to provide a uniform day of rest for all citizens,” and the fact that the day is the majority’s holy day “does not bar the State from achieving its secular goals.” In the companion case *Braunfeld v. Brown*, Orthodox Jewish merchants who closed Saturdays for their Sabbath were compelled to close Sundays as well: a two-day penalty for keeping the fourth commandment as written. Justice Douglas, alone in dissent, saw it plainly: “it is a strange Bill of Rights that makes it possible for the dominant religious group to bring the minority to heel because the minority, in the doing of acts which intrinsically are wholesome and not antisocial, does not defer to the majority’s religious beliefs.” *McGowan* is the standing legal machinery by which religious observance can be enforced under a secular label. That the report cites it approvingly, while the Heritage Foundation builds upon it a call for restored blue laws, tells Sabbath-keepers everything we need to know about where the “bridge” leads.

D. The Lessons of History and of Prophecy

The report assumes that closer union will strengthen both church and state. History records the opposite, and the pattern begins precisely where the Sunday-law tradition begins.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020585

On March 7, A.D. 321, Constantine decreed: “On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed” (Codex Justinianus 3.12.3). It was the first civil Sunday law, the fountainhead of every Sunday statute since, including those *McGowan* upheld. With imperial favor came imperial money, imperial buildings, and imperial politics. Court bishops such as Eusebius of Caesarea learned to flatter the throne; the church learned to reach for the sword it had once suffered under. Within sixty years the Edict of Thessalonica (A.D. 380) made one confession the official religion of the empire and branded all dissenters “foolish madmen.” Within five more years, Priscillian of Ávila and six companions were executed at Trier (c. A.D. 385), commonly cited as the first Christians put to death for heresy under a Christian state, over the protest of Ambrose of Milan and Martin of Tours, who saw where it must lead. It led to a millennium of coerced conformity, inquisition, and religious war.

And what did this union do for the state? It did not save Rome. The Western Empire, having married the church, collapsed within a century of Theodosius’s edict. The church, having married the empire, was corrupted into an institution that made emperors kneel and kindled the fires of persecution. Madison’s summary stands: fifteen centuries on trial, and the fruits were “pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution.”

Here a common assumption must be corrected, one the report shares. The danger is imagined chiefly as the state controlling the church. But the record of history, and the testimony of Scripture, point the other way: given a bridge, the church walks across it and mounts the state. Rome’s bishops did not end as servants of the emperors; the emperors ended as servants of the bishops. Scripture’s final warning pictures exactly this: not a beast devouring a woman, but “a woman sit[ting] upon a scarlet coloured beast”: the church riding, guiding, and spurring the civil power (Revelation 17:3). Many of the Reformers and the founders of America’s Protestant denominations read that prophecy as the history of the union of church and state, written in advance. A commission composed of religious leaders proposing to bridge church and state should ponder that the entity prophecy holds responsible for the persecutions of history is not the beast alone, but the woman who rides it. It is precisely because we love the church that we would keep her off that saddle.

E. The American Test Case: 1888

This nation has already faced the question the Heritage Foundation now reopens. In 1888, Senator H.W. Blair introduced S. 2983, “A bill to secure to the people the enjoyment of the first day of the week, commonly known as the Lord’s day, as a day of rest, and to promote its observance as a day of religious worship.” On December 13, 1888, Alonzo T. Jones, a Seventh-day Adventist, testified against it before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor. His argument (published as *The National Sunday Law*, 1889) remains the definitive American statement of the principle:

- “The principle upon which we stand is that civil government is civil, and has nothing to do, in the matter of legislation, with religious observances in any way. The basis of this is found in the words of Jesus Christ in Matt. 22:21.”

DOJ-RLC Comment-020586

- “When Caesar — civil government — exacts of men that which is God’s, he demands what does not belong to him; in so doing Caesar usurps the place and the prerogative of God.”
- “It is impossible to frame a law on the subject of religion that will not prohibit the free exercise of religion.”
- The state may punish incivility, never irreligion: “The sole question must ever be, Is the action civil or uncivil.”
- On majorities: if 999 of every 1,000 Americans kept the seventh day, “they would have no right to compel me to rest on Saturday.” Truth and duty to God are determined by an enlightened conscience bowing before the authority of the Word of God, never by a majority vote.
- And lest anyone suspect special pleading: “We are Seventh-day Adventists; but if this bill were in favor of enforcing the observance of the seventh day as the Lord’s day, we would oppose it just as much as we oppose it as it is now.”

Offered an exemption clause for seventh-day observers, our forebears refused it: “An exemption clause is only a toleration clause in disguise... The vocabulary of American ideas knows no such word as ‘toleration.’ It asserts rights.” Congress let the Blair bill die with the Fiftieth Congress, and the Republic was the better for it. The same arguments answer the same proposal today, whether it arrives as a national statute or as “restored” state blue laws blessed by federal policy.

F. Application to the Draft Report

1. **Recommendation 1 (DOJ “guidance” on the Establishment Clause).** The meaning of the First Amendment is not the executive branch’s to assign by memorandum. The report’s supporting narrative is faulty history: the wall predates Jefferson (Williams, 1644), Jefferson’s letter was addressed to persecuted believers, and the Court invoked it as early as 1879 (*Reynolds*), not the mid-twentieth century. I further note that where the Executive Summary states the government “may not officially prefer one religion over another, take over the functions of a church, or coerce religious observance,” Chapter 2’s restatement quietly drops “prefer one religion over another.” That omission is the whole controversy in miniature, and it should be restored.
2. **Recommendation 9 (repeal of the Johnson Amendment).** A pulpit that may endorse candidates will soon be courted, then captured, by parties; tax-deductible dollars will flow through churches into campaigns. This politicizes the church far more surely than any regulation it removes. Enforce the Johnson Amendment; do not repeal it.
3. **Funding recommendations.** Government money is never free. The state that funds the church will audit, condition, and eventually instruct the church, and the administration that funds faiths you favor will be succeeded by one that funds faiths you do not. Franklin said all that needs saying: a religion obliged to call for the help of the civil power confesses its own weakness.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020587

4. **The trajectory.** The report should expressly disclaim any federal or federally-encouraged "uniform day of rest," and decline to rest any part of its reasoning on *McGowan v. Maryland*. If the Commission does not intend that road, it costs nothing to say so; if it does, the country deserves to hear it plainly.

5. **Process.** A fifteen-day, scarcely-publicized comment window on a draft of this length, whose operative detail sits in an appendix, is inadequate to the gravity of what is proposed. I respectfully request an extension and wider notice.

G. Conclusion

While individuals of my faith may serve in governmental or advisory roles, no group of individuals represents the whole body of the church, and any position supporting a union of church and state does not reflect our beliefs or the historic teaching of our faith. We remain open to constructive dialogue and would welcome the opportunity to share further the biblical, historical, and constitutional foundations of these convictions.

"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man" (Psalm 118:8). The wall of separation was Christ's principle before it was Jefferson's metaphor; it was carried by Williams and the Baptists, written into law by Madison and Jefferson, signed by Washington, defended before the Senate by my own church's pioneers, and upheld by the Supreme Court for a century. It protects the church from the state, the state from the church, and the conscience from both. Keep the wall.

Respectfully submitted,

Craig King
Athens, AL

Sources: RLC Draft Report (Exec. Summary, Conclusion, Recs. 1 & 9, Chs. 1–2); A.T. Jones, "The National Sunday Law" (Pacific Press, 1889) (testimony of Dec. 13, 1888 on S. 2983, 50th Cong.; official transcript at Misc. Doc. No. 43, 50th Cong., 2d Sess., pp. 73–102); Heritage Foundation Special Report No. 323, "Saving America by Saving the Family" (Jan. 8, 2026), § "Support for a Uniform Day of Rest"; R. Williams, "Mr. Cottons Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered" (1644); Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (1786); Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Assn. (Jan. 1, 1802); Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance" (1785), Veto Message (Feb. 21, 1811), Letter to the Baptist Churches of North Carolina (June 3, 1811), Detached Memoranda (ca. 1817); Washington to the United Baptist Churches of Virginia (May 1789) and to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport (Aug. 18, 1790); Franklin to Richard Price (Oct. 9, 1780); Treaty of Tripoli, art. 11 (1797); U.S. Const. art. VI; Watson v. Jones, 80 U.S. 679 (1872); Reynolds v. United States, 98 U.S. 145 (1879); W. Va. Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette, 319 U.S. 624 (1943); Everson v. Bd. of Ed., 330 U.S. 1 (1947); Torcaso v. Watkins, 367 U.S. 488 (1961); McGowan v. Maryland, 366 U.S. 420 (1961); Braunfeld v. Brown, 366 U.S. 599 (1961); Engel v. Vitale, 370 U.S. 421 (1962); Codex Justinianus 3.12.3 (Schaff trans.); Codex Theodosianus 16.1.2 (Edict of Thessalonica, A.D. 380).

DOJ-RLC Comment-020588

From: Connie Jeffery <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Freedom
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:08:54 -0400
Importance: Normal

I am writing to express my concern over the constitutional principle of "separation of church and state." As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe the government has no authority to tell a person what to believe or how to worship. As Thomas Jefferson said, "religion is a matter which lies solely between Man and his God." I am writing to add my name to a list of like-minded Americans who value this freedom to worship (or not to worship) as we believe.
Thank you for your kind attention.

Yours truly,
Connie Jeffery
Sent from my iPhone

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT regarding the report of Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:10:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Judy Northrop

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and speak regarding the draft report released on June 26, 2026 by the Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty.

For approximately 250 years, in our beloved United States of America, we have enjoyed freedom to worship and serve God according to the dictates of our conscience. What a blessing this has been! I believe this is one reason God has greatly prospered our country.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I also believe that God would have His children worship Him because they want to, not because they are forced. This involves giving them the freedom to choose to worship Him as conscience shall tell them to, or not to worship Him. In the Garden of Eden, God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, along with the tree of life, because He valued man's freedom of choice. Only by choice could man truly worship, love, and have a relationship with God.

If only Adam and Eve had chosen to obey, we would not be in this dilemma of sin. What terrible consequences of disobedience! And yet, God, knowing the end from the beginning, still created the world, still gave Adam and Eve the choice, and still gives us the choice today, whether to worship Him or not. Our choice is our own to make, and the ultimate inevitable consequences are ours to bear. (Were it not for Jesus and His sacrifice, none of us would have the slightest chance of escaping sin and its wages - death.)

Governments are necessary to punish evildoers, in the arena of man's duty to man (the last six of the ten commandments). Crime must be prevented, life and property must be protected. However, when it comes to our duty to God, I believe the government should be neutral, allowing each person to decide whom and how to worship.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof...." When the Government makes a law respecting an establishment of religion (such as, funding religious organizations), in order to be fair, would it not then need to do the same for all establishments of religion? Either that, or make judgments as to which ones are worthy (in its opinion) of being funded. The Government then would become the judge of which religious establishments are good, and religious persecution (in different forms) would follow - a new system of "Dark Ages."

Likewise, when the Church tries to step in and take over the State, or promote certain politicians, using the arm of the State to enforce the church's beliefs, religious intolerance also follows. How can the State remain neutral toward different religious organizations, when it is controlled by one or more of them?

I do have a problem with the godlessness and greatly declining morality of the USA and other countries as well, but how could this possibly be corrected by force (when it has to do with one's duty to God)? It is a matter of the heart. Preachers and others who love God and their fellowmen are the ones to reach out in God's way, knowing that those for whom they are working still have their own choice to make.

In my understanding, it is of utmost importance to maintain a separation of Church and State, and not try to connect them again, as in the Dark Ages. Let our duty to God be preached, not legislated; let candidates for public office be elected by the public, not maneuvered into office by religious organizations.

I request that we keep the Johnson Amendment, and maintain a wall between the Church and the State, thus protecting both of them from corruption, persecution, and chaos. And may God grant that we continue to enjoy freedom of conscience, while allowing others the same.

Sincerely,

Judy Northrop

Loma Linda, California

From: Kathy Kendall <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Separation of Church and State – John and Kathy Kendall
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:20:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

As private citizens of the United States of America (tracing our American ancestors back multiple generations), we are opposed to the recommendations in your report to repeal the Johnson Amendment and to weaken the separation between church and state.

Charitable (501c3) organizations, religious or not, are supposed to be non-political in order to enjoy tax-exempt status. They exist to help the public, regardless of race, gender, political standing, or religious preference. If they support a particular candidate, they are stepping outside of their non-partisan role, and do not deserve tax-exempt status.

We do not believe this is a violation of anyone's right to free speech. Organization leaders are free to voice whatever opinion they hold, as long as they do it as individual, and make it clear that they are *not* speaking for the organization they lead. Any organizational title they hold should only be used for identification purposes, not as an implication of organizational backing of their political words, activities, and / or positions.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we are also opposed to government-supported religious instruction on public campuses (educational or judicial), whether it be simply posting a copy of the 10 commandments or (in the case of educational institutions), requiring classes promoting any religion (Christianity [including our own denomination], Judaism, Mormonism, Buddhism, Hinduism, whatever). Taxpayers should not be forced (through the use of their tax dollars) to support something they do not believe.

We urge you to keep the *bipartisan* Johnson Amendment intact, and to fully enforce it. It is there for the protection of both the church and the government.

While we have not, personally, suffered religious discrimination, history and current news are full of examples of religious discrimination and persecution. There is also an abundance of world-wide evidence of the disastrous consequences of the state interfering (financially or otherwise) in religious affairs, and / or religious entities appealing to the state to enforce their beliefs.

This "bridge" between church and state, this idea of the state funding of religious activities, or 501c3 organizations promoting political candidates, is the proverbial "camel's nose in the tent door." It is the first step down a very slippery slope. Eventually, the "camel" will fully occupy the "tent," and there will be no room for conscientiously held beliefs. He who holds the purse strings ultimately takes full control.

We urge you to keep church and state separate, and to fully support (and enforce!) the Johnson Amendment.

John and Kathy Kendall
Basehor, KS

Making Sense of Natural Disasters
Certainty in an Uncertain World
War in Heaven
Myths about Hell
Newton's Forgotten Discovery
. . . and more . . .

I'm using Inbox When Ready to protect my focus.

From: Abel Hagan <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Maintain separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:22:46 -0400
Importance: Normal

As a Christian all of my life, serving now as a minister of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, I want to make an appeal to maintain separation of church and state.

World History and Bible History alike tell of some of the ugliest errors of governments who did not maintain that protection. The Founders of our country worked hard to maintain it while still protecting the free exercise of religion. We are a great country and blessed by God. While we depend on Him, we must operate according to the principles of Heaven which allow folks to exercise religion freely according to conscience or not at all. Free will is necessary for love - and which is the basis of true worship and obedience as Jesus cited in John 14:15 “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Thank you for listening to the people concerned!

Prayerfully,

Pastor Abel Hagan

From: Daniel McGrath <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment for the Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:29:30 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: image.png

July 13, 2026

PUBLIC COMMENT – Religious Liberty and the Constitution
To the Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

Thank you for the considerable work that went into preparing the Commission's report on religious liberty. I appreciate the Commission's sincere desire to strengthen the free exercise of religion and to protect Americans from government actions that unnecessarily burden religious belief and practice. The free exercise of religion is a foundational American liberty and an unalienable right given to us by God. It deserves vigorous protection.

As a Seventh-day Adventist minister and an advocate for religious liberty, I write with deep concern that several of the report's recommendations unintentionally weaken another constitutional safeguard that has protected religious freedom for more than two centuries: the principle that government must remain neutral among religions while protecting the free exercise of all. Religious liberty has flourished in the United States not because government has favored religion, but because it has refused to establish or privilege one religious tradition over another. One of the great strengths of the First Amendment is that the Free Exercise Clause and the Establishment Clause work together. One protects religious practice; the other protects every citizen from governmental preference for religion.

I am particularly concerned by the report's recommendation that the Department of Justice issue new guidance on clarifying "the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and separation of church and state" (page 22). While the phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the Constitution, the underlying constitutional principle has long served as an important safeguard against government entanglement with religion. The report's recommendations would move our nation toward a closer relationship between religion and government representing a significant departure from the constitutional balance that has protected Americans of every faith and those with no faith.

Likewise, I am concerned by the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment (pages 23, 128, and 201). Although reasonable people may debate its effectiveness, eliminating the distinction between churches and partisan political activity risks drawing religious institutions more deeply into political power struggles. Religious organizations should be free to address moral issues without becoming instruments of partisan politics.

One of the themes throughout the report is that government should actively encourage and facilitate religious expression in public life, including schools, government institutions, and public officials. The report encourages government officials to remove barriers to religious expression while giving comparatively little attention to preserving governmental neutrality in matters of religion. Its examples and recommendations focus primarily

on Christian institutions and concerns. While that emphasis is understandable given America's religious demographics, I encourage the Commission to evaluate its recommendations through the lens of the least protected religious communities as well. Taken together, these recommendations move beyond protecting the free exercise of religion toward encouraging religion through government. I respectfully suggest that the government's role is not to encourage religion, but to protect every citizen's right to practice, change, or decline religion according to conscience. Genuine religious liberty is strongest when public policy is developed from the perspective of the least protected religious community rather than the most influential one.

My concern is not rooted in opposition to Christianity or to robust religious expression. On the contrary, I believe religious faith should have a vibrant place in American society. My concern is that constitutional protections should always be crafted with tomorrow's religious minority in mind, not merely today's religious majority. The legal framework that protects evangelical Christians today must also protect Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Seventh-day Adventists, Catholics, Latter-day Saints, atheists, and every other American equally. A principle that only works when "my own faith" holds cultural influence is not a principle that adequately protects religious liberty.

As Seventh-day Adventists, our commitment to religious liberty has never been limited to defending our own freedoms. We have historically defended the liberty of conscience of every individual because rights secured only for the majority are rights that can eventually be denied to everyone else.

In my own ministry, I have had the privilege of defending the religious liberty of individuals whose beliefs differ significantly from my own. I have done so gladly because liberty of conscience is not merely a constitutional principle; it is a moral one. The freedoms I seek for my own faith must be the same freedoms I am willing to defend for others.

History has shown us that when governments become closely aligned with dominant religious movements, minority faiths inevitably lose equal standing. By contrast, the United States has become a global model of religious liberty because it has generally resisted allowing the government to determine which forms of religion deserve encouragement. America's constitutional framework has protected Catholics when Protestants held political power, Protestants when Catholics gained influence, Jews, Muslims, Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and those of no faith. This constitutional commitment to neutrality in matters of religion has protected religious minorities remarkably well for more than two centuries while allowing religion to flourish voluntarily and preserving the conscience rights of every citizen. I respectfully urge the Commission to preserve that remarkable legacy.

I encourage the Commission to revise its report by reaffirming that the Establishment Clause remains an essential partner to the Free Exercise Clause, that governmental neutrality in matters of religion continues to be one of America's greatest protections for religious liberty, and that policies should be evaluated by how well they preserve the equal rights of religious majorities, religious minorities, and those who claim no religious faith.

True religious liberty is measured not by how well it protects those with political influence, but by how faithfully it protects those without it.

I respectfully ask the Commission to strengthen its report so that it preserves the constitutional freedoms that have made the United States a refuge for people of every faith and of none.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

Daniel McGrath
Director of Public Affairs & Religious Liberty
MICHIGAN CONFERENCE
OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS
PII *Tel*
Website



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Seventh-day Adventist® Church
MICHIGAN CONFERENCE

From: kathy bouza <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious liberty commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:36:11 -0400
Importance: Normal

To Whom it may concern,
I want to send my concern about ending the separation of Church and State. I am a Seventh-Day Adventist Christian and I believe the founding fathers most certainly wanted to separate church and state. If you do not, whose version of Christianity will we go by?
Please leave our constitution in tact by leaving church and state separated the way the founding fathers had intended.
Thank you,
Kathy Bouza

From: Dexsy Lo <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Freedom of belief
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:47:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission:

I write as a private citizen from Calgary, moved by a plea I hope you will take to heart: history testifies that when governments deny freedom of belief, injustice and death follow. Our ancestors fought for that freedom, and I write in their memory. Faith in God cannot be imposed; it must be freely chosen, or it is not faith at all. When the state forces belief, it violates the free will God Himself gave to humanity, and no commission acting in America's name should be in the business of overriding that gift.

Some now argue that strict separation of church and state was a later invention, foreign to the founders' intent. The record says otherwise. Virginia's long struggle from 1776 to 1786, Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance, Jefferson's Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, the ban on religious tests in Article VI, and the ratifying conventions that demanded the First Amendment all show a deliberate design, pressed for by the churches themselves, who had felt establishment weigh on them from underneath. Madison, who drafted the 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 most flagrant usurpation. A commission that would enlist the state on behalf of religion must reckon with Madison's own words, not a modern gloss on them.

This is not only the founders' judgment but the government's own precedent. When Sabbatarians petitioned Congress in 1829 to halt Sunday mail, the Senate committee answered 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. The House committee the following year warned that if a legislative act may define one point of religious duty, it may with equal propriety define every religious obligation down to the forms of worship itself. And it observed, with plain honesty, that if Congress declared the first day of the week holy, it would not convince the Jew or the Sabbatarian, but only dissatisfy both, since human power may extort vain sacrifices while the Deity alone commands the affections of the heart. That was Congress speaking of Congress, one generation removed from the founding.

History also shows what coercion does to the faith it means to protect. Madison surveyed fifteen centuries of established Christianity and found the fruits to be pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, and in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution. Forcing attendance or observance breeds hypocrites, never believers, because love for God cannot be legislated. Even General Grant counseled that religion be left to the family altar, the church, and the private school, keeping state and church forever separate. State favor does not strengthen faith; on the historical record, it corrupts it.

And this is not abstract. Salem's judges were sincere and learned, yet they did wanton violence to the plainest principles of morality while believing they served God. Two centuries later, in 1892, Tennessee jailed and chain-ganged Seventh-day Adventist farmers, one sixty-two years old, for plowing on Sunday after resting on Saturday, while trainloads of workmen passed the jail unmolested every week. Sincerity did not protect them, and it will not protect the next targeted minority. The question is never whether today's sponsors mean well, but what the machinery does once built, and who controls it next.

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

Respectfully,

Dexsy Lopez
Calgary, AB

From: Michelle Kendrick <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:48:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

To: The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Dear Sir or Madam,

I write as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and an American citizen who deeply values both religious liberty and the constitutional principles that have protected it for generations. I respectfully express my concern regarding the recent conclusion of the Religious Liberty Commission suggesting that there is no true or absolute separation between church and state.

I believe this conclusion deserves careful reconsideration. The distinction between the authority of civil government and the authority of the church is not only consistent with Scripture, but is also supported by history and reflected in the constitutional framework that has safeguarded religious liberty in the United States for more than two centuries.

First, Scripture establishes distinct spheres of authority. Jesus 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-given responsibility to preserve justice, protect its citizens, and maintain civil order. The church is called to proclaim the gospel and nurture the spiritual life of believers. While Christians should faithfully influence society through their convictions and service, matters of worship and conscience belong to God alone and cannot rightly be compelled by civil authority.

Second, history consistently demonstrates the wisdom of maintaining this distinction. Whenever civil power has been used to advance or enforce religion, both the church and the state have suffered. The medieval union of church and state, the persecution that followed the Protestant Reformation, and the experiences that led many early settlers to seek religious freedom in America all remind us that genuine faith cannot be produced through governmental authority. Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island and one of America's earliest champions of religious liberty, argued for a "hedge or wall of separation" between the church and the civil government—not to exclude faith from public life, but to protect the purity of the church from political influence and to preserve liberty of conscience for every individual. Religious liberty flourishes when faith is freely chosen rather than legally compelled.

Third, the American constitutional system reflects these lessons. The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and prohibits the establishment

of religion by the federal government. This principle was never intended to remove faith from public life. Rather, it protects every citizen's freedom to live according to conscience while preventing government from favoring one religion or compelling religious observance. The Declaration of Independence likewise recognizes that our unalienable rights are endowed by our Creator, affirming that government exists to secure God-given rights rather than grant them. Together, these founding principles have served as one of the greatest safeguards of both religious liberty and civil peace.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe this issue carries particular significance. From our earliest history, our church has defended liberty of conscience for people of every faith and for those of no faith at all. Our pioneers opposed any use of civil power to compel religious observance, not merely because of historical experience, but because they understood from Scripture that worship acceptable to God must always be voluntary. Seventh-day Adventists have also long understood the prophetic warnings concerning the misuse of civil authority in matters of worship. While those beliefs are uniquely ours, they have strengthened—not weakened—our commitment to defend the religious liberty of every person, regardless of creed. This commitment has long distinguished the Seventh-day Adventist Church and remains one of its most important contributions to both religious and civic life.

Protecting the distinction between church and state does not diminish the role of faith in society. On the contrary, it allows religion to flourish without political coercion and enables government to protect the rights of all citizens equally. People of faith should continue to participate fully in public life, bringing their moral convictions to civic discussion. Yet government must never assume authority over conscience, nor should religious institutions rely upon the coercive power of the state to accomplish spiritual ends.

I respectfully urge your office to continue upholding the historic principles of religious liberty and freedom of conscience that have served our nation so well. Preserving a clear distinction between civil authority and religious authority protects not only constitutional freedoms, but also the integrity of faith itself.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our nation.

Respectfully,

Michelle Kendrick

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From: Francesco Blackmore <francescoblackmore@gmail.com>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 18:53:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.

As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."
It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.

Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.
Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter.
Sincerely,

Francesco Blackmore

From: Megan Blackmore <megan.blackmore@sneconline.org>
To: "RLC@usdoj.gov" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:00:48 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

We are proud citizens of the United States of America and a Seventh-day Adventist Christians. We, along with millions of other Seventh-day Adventist church members, staunchly believe in and recognize the necessity of freedom of conscience and the separation between church and state.

As stated in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution:
"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."
It was Jesus Christ Himself who stated, "Render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." Jesus recognized that while the world is interconnected, there are some things that are legitimately within the purview of the state, while there are other things rightfully and only within the purview of God and faith. As followers of Jesus, we believe His words and trust His wisdom. Our Founding Fathers also recognized this truth by including language that provides for the separation between church and state in the very first amendment to our Constitution.

Weakening this boundary—whether by using government money to fund religious activities or by repealing the Johnson Amendment—will not strengthen faith or advance the cause of Christ. Instead, it invites political corruption and encourages houses of worship to compete for grants, ultimately answering to politicians rather than to God. History proves that when church and state join hands, both suffer. We need look no further than the Dark Ages to see that entanglements between church and state lead to corruption and persecution.
Please protect the integrity of faith and democracy. Keep the wall of separation intact so that both church and state can remain free. We appreciate your time and attention on this matter.

Sincerely,
Megan Blackmore

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From: Linda Gerace <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Linda Gerace
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:18:18 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I am writing as a citizen AND as a person of faith to ask you to reconsider the recommendations in your report that would weaken the separation of church and state.

I am not very eloquent, but in one of my favorite books, The Great Controversy, by Ellen G. White, she predicts the events that are unfolding before our very eyes and will eventually occur if the wall of separation between church and state is weakened:

"God never forces the will or the conscience; but Satan's constant resort—to gain control of those whom he cannot otherwise seduce—is compulsion by cruelty. Through fear or force he endeavors to rule the conscience and to secure homage to himself. To accomplish this, he works through both religious and secular authorities, moving them to the enforcement of human laws in defiance of the law of God. [592]

Find out more today how to get a special discount when you purchase a hardcover or paperback copy of ***The Great Controversy***.

Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society, causing anarchy and corruption, and calling down the judgments of God upon the earth. Their conscientious scruples will be pronounced obstinacy, stubbornness, and contempt of authority. They will be accused of disaffection toward the government. Ministers who deny the obligation of the divine law will present from the pulpit the duty of yielding obedience to the civil authorities as ordained of God. In legislative halls and courts of justice, commandment keepers will be misrepresented and condemned. A false coloring will be given to their words; the worst construction will be put upon their motives.

As the Protestant churches reject the clear, Scriptural arguments in defense of God's law, they will long to silence those whose faith they cannot overthrow by the Bible. Though they blind their own eyes to the fact, they are now adopting a course which will lead to the persecution of those who conscientiously refuse to do what the rest of the Christian world are doing, and acknowledge the claims of the papal sabbath.

The dignitaries of church and state will unite to bribe, persuade, or compel all classes to honor the Sunday. The lack of divine authority will be supplied by oppressive enactments. 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. Liberty of conscience, which has cost so great a sacrifice, will no longer be respected. In the soon-coming conflict we shall see exemplified the prophet's words: "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."

My prayer is that Dr. Ben Carson has kept the Seventh-day Adventist faith taught to him by his mother and has already explained to the committee the ramifications of the passage of the RLC committee recommendations. If not, please secure for yourselves and read The Great Controversy by Ellen G. White. And, please, continue to allow true religious freedom in this great country to exist for all its citizens, whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or whatever religious affiliation one abides by.

Sincerely,

Linda Gerace

Longs, South Carolina

From: Lupo <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] AMENDED: PUBLIC COMMENT – [Church-State Separation] – [Daniel Lupo]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:44:02 -0400
Importance: Normal
Inline-Images: ATT00001.png

Please accept this corrected version of my public comment and disregard the previous email sent earlier today due to typographical errors. Thank you.

Dear distinguished members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

I would like to share some simple Bible verses that present biblical support for the maintenance of our country's separation of church and state. These verses are very meaningful to me:

Matthew 22:21 – 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. (Please see **Matthew 22:17-20** for more context on this discussion).

- Jesus outlines a distinction between meeting the obligations of governing power in the world and fulfilling our service to God.

Luke 12:13-14 – 13 And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. 14 And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

- There is a clear separation between the exaction of civil law and the upholding of God's law within our personal Christian ministry, consistent with our liberty of conscience.

John 18:36 – 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 to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

- Jesus clearly states that His Kingdom is not of this world. This teaching contradicted the popular expectations of the Jews, who anticipated that the Messiah would establish a geopolitical, earthly kingdom during His first advent.

- **NOTE**: I am deeply concerned by the official reversion of the title "Secretary of Defense" back to "Secretary of War," which sets a troubling, aggressive tone. A union of church and state could lead to the fusion of state military power with sacred Scripture in a manner that misrepresents God's character and presents His servants as people who should use physical warfare to enforce a spiritual kingdom. This directly violates Christ's mandate in **John 18:36** (See also **2 Corinthians 10:3-5**). When Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus (**John 18:10**), Jesus immediately rebuked the violence (**John 18:11**) and miraculously healed the servant's ear (**Luke 22:51**), proving that His gospel is never to be advanced by the sword of the state.

Acts 1:6 – 6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

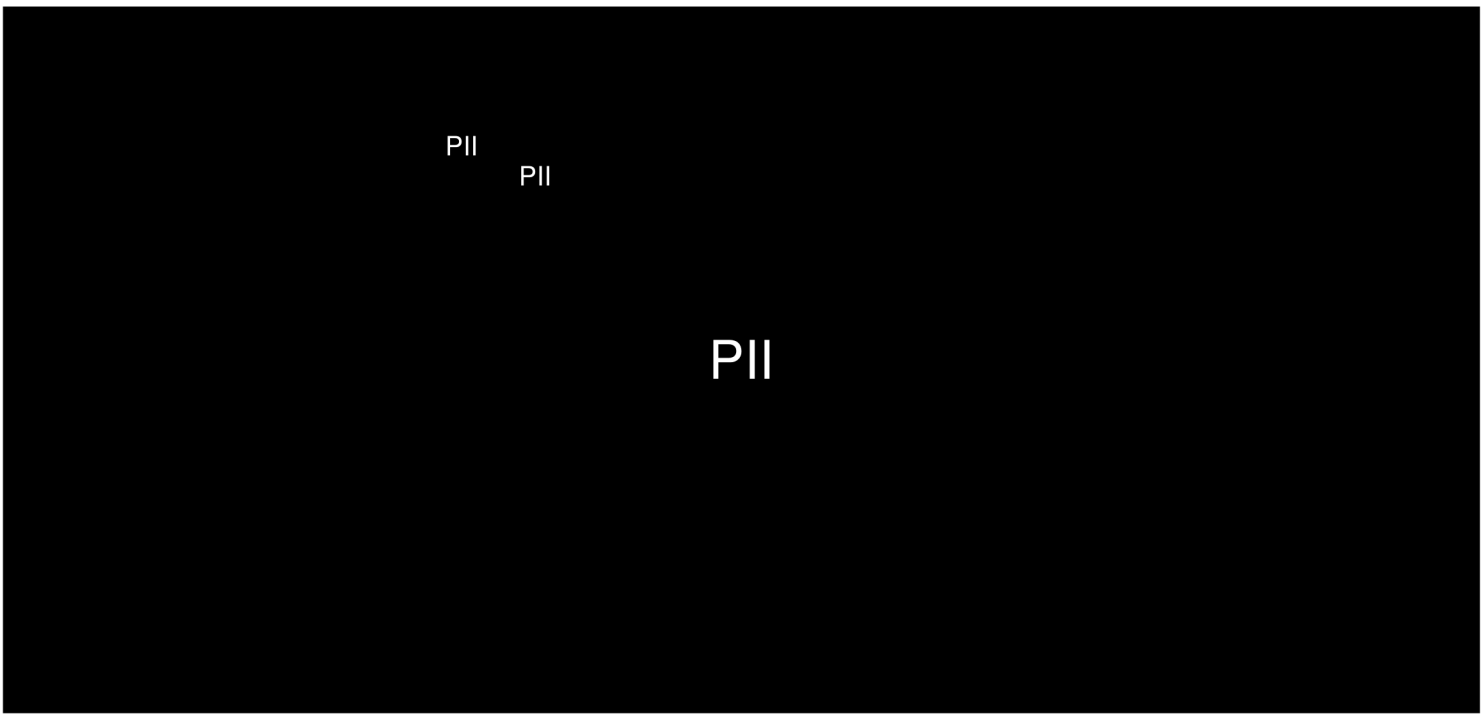
- Even after Christ had risen, His most dedicated followers still believed that His kingdom would be set up on earth then and there. They walked with Him, they ate with Him, they suffered with Him, and yet, they still did

not understand Him. We know better now, and we have an obligation and high calling to support Christ's stance on the separation of church and state.

Thank you all for your time and tireless efforts.

In closing,

2 Corinthians 13:13-14 – 13 All the saints salute you. 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.



From: Andrew Hibbert <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION – ANDREW HIBBERT
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 19:56:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission:

I am writing as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and citizen who strongly supports both religious free exercise and the separation of church and state.

I appreciate the report's defense of religious accommodation, parental rights, and equal treatment for religious individuals and organizations. However, I am concerned that some recommendations move beyond protecting religious liberty toward a closer institutional partnership between government and religion.

The report's description of the church-state relationship as a "bridge" is especially troubling. Government should protect religious institutions, but it should not assume responsibility for helping them flourish. Government funding and political favor can create dependency, invite regulation, and require officials to decide which religious activities deserve support. Separation protects religious institutions from political capture as much as it protects government from religious control.

Religious organizations should receive equal access to neutral public benefits, but taxpayer funds should not directly finance worship, evangelism, devotional instruction, or religious formation. Government contracts with faith-based organizations should pay for clearly defined public services, not religious activity.

I also urge caution regarding repeal of the Johnson Amendment. Religious leaders must remain free to preach about morality, public policy, and the character of public officials. But tax-exempt churches should not become campaign organizations or conduits for tax-deductible partisan spending. A narrower reform should protect sermons and issue advocacy while retaining restrictions on direct candidate campaigning with charitable resources.

Finally, religious-liberty protections must be applied consistently, including within the government bodies charged with defending them. I strongly disagree with Carrie Prejean-Boller's theological and political positions, and nothing in this comment should be understood as endorsing them. Nevertheless, the Commission's response to her raises an important question of religious expression. How does it distinguish protected religious expression from conduct incompatible with service on a public commission? That standard should be clearly stated and applied consistently, even when the expression at issue is objectionable. Otherwise, government risks becoming an arbiter of acceptable theology rather than a neutral protector of conscience.

I respectfully ask the Commission to reaffirm principled government neutrality, distinguish equal access from direct religious funding, and protect religious speech without encouraging the partisan capture of churches.

Church-state separation is one of the strongest protections of faith, conscience, and religious independence. Let us not undermine what the Founders have built.

Sincerely,

Andrew Hibbert
Jupiter, Florida

From: Richard Clark <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State - Richard E. Clark
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:30:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

7-13-26

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for your interest in preserving religious freedom in our country and for your service on the Religious Liberty Commission.

The creation of a governmental system where people are free to choose and practice their religion (or lack thereof), free from the intrusion of the state, is one of the most significant and precious accomplishments in the history of human government. Thankfully, and I believe, providentially, the people of the United States through the Constitution, as amended, were able to abandon the oppressive church-state models of Europe and colonial Massachusetts for the fresh air of the Rhode Island model.

Doing so required imposing limits on governmental authority relative to religion. The fact that the First Amendment requires government *to not do* certain things, to neither establish nor interfere with religion, clearly constitutes a boundary, a wall. A wall that provides a sanctuary of safety from governmental overreach with regard to religion.

Differing religious convictions produce differing, sometimes opposing, agendas. The government cannot be part of favoring, much the less enforcing one of those agendas more than another. The constitutional wall that is so inconvenient to those pushing one agenda, becomes a wall of protection for those with a less-favored agenda. We must not, for the sake of advantage in furthering our own agenda or the majority's agenda, pull one stone from that protecting wall.

Take the 10 commandments for instance. I am a Seventh-day Adventist. As such, I place significant importance on the 10 commandments in my life. Further, I would hope for my friends and neighbors to think the same way. Should I support the posting of copies of the 10 commandments on classroom walls?

The State of Texas requires the posting of these commandments. In the Texas version, the fourth commandment states, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Should I protest the omission of the next words of the commandment, which I take to be critically significant: "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God."? Would everyone supporting the posting of the commandments in Texas also support influence in the classroom that the Sabbath is in fact, the seventh day, in opposition to what they might be observing according to their own consciences?

I attended graduate school at Kansas State University (KSU), a public university. One of the requirements of my program was to take periodic cumulative exams, given on scheduled Saturday mornings. KSU kindly accommodated my request to take those exams on a day that was not my Sabbath. There were no 10 commandments on the wall, no discussions of what I should or should not be doing. I was allowed to keep Sabbath in the way I believe, and some folks saw someone trying to live consistently with his beliefs. Commandments belong, if we choose, in our hearts and on the walls of our homes and our churches, not on public classroom walls in versions of someone else's choice, imposed on people that might not even care to believe in God.

I have spent many years teaching in Seventh-day Adventist colleges and have offered prayer many times before class. I have also taught in public university as a graduate assistant. That kind of prayer was not part of the picture there. Once one of my lab students said to me “You are a Christian, aren’t you?” I responded,” . . I try to be.” The point here is that positive, affirmative Christian influence can happen in a public sphere without a trace of government help.

I am writing as a religious conservative. As much as we dream of having the world around us resonate with our convictions, we must not be tempted toward the forcing of that desire into action. There is an amendment (call it a wall if you will) that has been ratified to prevent that.

Can we do nothing? Are the admirable desires of the Religious Liberty Commission in vain? Are we forced to sit back and wring our hands as the world around us falls apart morally?

We point again to Rhode Island. Under Roger Williams’ government, the two natural divisions of the 10 commandments (the first ones focusing on duty to God and the last ones focusing on duty to fellow humans) align nicely with the concept of separation of church and state[1]. Civil government must leave the first four commandments (who to worship, how to worship, when to worship) between people and their God. On the other hand, civil government has great responsibility and great authority in the last six (respect for authority, respect for human life, respect for the family, respect for others property, respect for the truth). Here is the model that has given us the freedom we treasure, the model that will continue to protect the wall of separation, and the model that will at the same time protect our society.

Sincerely,

Richard E. Clark

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[1] https://www.libertymagazine.org/article/the-two-tables-of-the-law (accessed 7-13-26)

From: William Enclosure <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the Religious Liberty Comission Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:31:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

Good Day,

I want to let you know that I love America. I am a Christian; however, I do not agree with what the commission has recommended. There may come a day when the leadership of America has different views than it has now. When those days come, if there is no separation of church and state, America could be turned into any type of nation that we are currently not.

If we take away the separation of church and state, we will be no better than the Arab countries we try to liberate and bring democracy to. I am a Seventh-day Adventist and I love being an American because I can worship God according to the dictates of my conscience here. But if these recommendations go through, many people will have the power to change that. Because we are a minority, it means that our voices will not be heeded when the majority wants to change things.

Let us please keep the separation of church and state instead of allowing the rules to change, which will enable everyone—including enemies with religions I know the commission does not like—to use these changes. In other words, with the separation of church and state, it is basically saying, "may the best religion win." And if it is not the religion you want, will it be okay? I, many people I know, and many Americans say: NO!

Keep the separation and do not force religion on people. Jesus did not force. Muhammad and Islam did force. Who do we want to model America after? Thank you for hearing this, and I pray the right decision is made.

May God Have Mercy On Our Souls,
Ronnie Greenaway

From: Nathan Jaquez <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – History and Constitution – Nathan Jaquez
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:38:16 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern,

I am a proud citizen of the United States and a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. I have heard some alarming news that, like so many times in the history of our country and the world, some people have taken it upon themselves to step towards tearing down that invisible wall called the separation of church and state. As a good student of American history, I am aware of the tension between church and state that has taken place in our country in the past.

Many of the first Europeans to inhabit this land did so seeking (at least in part) religious freedom, and many of our founding fathers were men of faith. Many even went so far as to pray before government assemblies. However, there were also great men of our country who were atheists, and still others who were agnostics, deists, Jewish, or part of countless other religions or lack thereof. As a man of faith myself, I greatly appreciate the words of Benjamin Franklin - himself a confessed deist - spoken during the Constitutional Convention. He said, ". . .if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?"

I am convinced that it was God Almighty who helped to form this *free* country where anyone can worship Him in the way He has asked us. I believe wholeheartedly that this country will continue to thrive only if the people in it continue to worship their Creator in the way He has so lovingly laid out in His word. However, I believe, as declared in the First Amendment, that it is up to *the people* to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience.

The Lord Almighty does not coerce but invites us to worship Him. It should be the same way in this country, the way our Founding Fathers intended. As an American and a Christian, I believe that anyone holding government office or a government sponsored job should be free to worship God Almighty and live out godly lives with the same freedom as every other US Citizen. However, any law encouraging the definitive union of church and state directed at its employees or any other U.S. citizen will cause our nation to stumble in the footsteps of countless others. Such laws are created by statesmen who are unwilling to live out an example of godliness in their own lives and who leave evangelism to their governing authority to be done by force. When given in love, the gospel is the best news, but when given by force, it is not the gospel, and it is not good news.

The United States has never mandated the separation of church and state, but she has also never caused such a union. May we leave in place what our founding fathers were led by God to establish: an invisible wall of separation between church and state which has made this country a land of the free.

Nathan Jaquez

From: Bryan Steinweg <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – – [NAME]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:40:19 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Response_to_Commission.pdf

Hello RLC!

I agree 100% with Pillar of Freedom's comments (see attached pdf) and recommendations. Without proper separation of Church and State, we will lose true religious liberty in the USA 🇺🇸!

Bryan Steinweg
Concerned US Citizen from WA state

PILLAR OF FREEDOM

Religious Liberty • Freedom of Conscience • Separation of Church and State

July 6, 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 separation of church and state is among America's greatest achievements, grounded in the Constitution and central to our freedom. The Religious Liberty Commission's report undermines this principle by proposing to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a bridge. The wall of separation was not a secular invention imposed upon religion — it was built by people of faith, to protect faith. Breaching that wall will set the churches against one another in competition for government money and favor, and set the church against the state as each seeks power over the other — eroding the very freedom the Commission claims to defend. The Commission has recommended increasing government funding of religious activities and recommended repealing the Johnson Amendment. Both of

[redacted]

DOJ-RLC Comment-020615

these recommendations, if followed, will bring the corruption of the political process into the churches. In making its recommendations the Commission has relied upon a faulty retelling of our history.

The American Development of Separation of Church and State

The establishment of a wall of separation between the church and the state first appeared in the modern world in 1636 when Roger Williams founded the colony of Rhode Island. The success of Roger Williams' experiment would later inspire the colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware, and to a lesser extent other colonies to roll back their religious legislation long before the Revolution of 1776. By 1790, all but three of the original 13 had disestablished their churches, and by 1833, the final state, Massachusetts, had disestablished its church as well. No state would ever enter the Union with an established church. The United States had learned from the colonies that liberty prospered better where church and state were separate. While the states themselves would take some time to extricate themselves from religious entanglements, the drafters and signers of the Constitution recognized the value of religious liberty.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the French statesman who toured the United States from 1831 to 1832, observed this about the cause of religion's power in America and how religion indirectly influenced the nation.

> In order to learn more about [the separation of church and state], I questioned the faithful of all communions. … To each of them I expressed my astonishment and revealed my doubts, and I discovered that they differed among themselves only on matters of detail: to a man, they assigned primary credit for the peaceful ascendancy of religion in their country to the complete separation of church and state. I state without hesitation that during my stay in America I met no one — not a single clergyman or layman — who did not agree with this statement.[1]

[1]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 341.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020616

> The [clergy] are careful to remain aloof from public affairs and do not involve themselves in the machinations of the parties. Therefore, one cannot say that religion in the United States influences the laws or the specifics of political opinion, but it does shape mores, and it is by regulating the family that religion endeavors to regulate the state.[2]

The Commission itself recognizes "that religious liberty remains one of the greatest sources of American strength," and that "preserving it will require vigilance, education, and renewed commitment from institutions and citizens alike." Presidential Commission on Religious Liberty Draft Report at 13. The report then goes on to highlight a list of areas where religion and religious people are under attack. These areas of attack are fairly portrayed, and all people of faith should be concerned about the attack. America is in a culture war, and much of the battle is over values that are informed by religion. While the report does not go so far as to explicitly state that atheistic secularism is a religion, it certainly functions as one, and when the state supports secularism in its worst forms, the state is taking sides in the culture war against religion. This needs to stop.

The Commission's Revisionist History of the American Experience

First, the Commission tells a false history of religious liberty in the colonies and in the early history of the nation. It completely ignores that the idea of building a wall of separation between the church and the state is a very old idea, which was fully enunciated in 1644 by Roger Williams. Report at 37. Next, they ignore the fact that Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware followed Rhode Island's example by keeping a wall of separation between the church and the state. They also ignore that other colonies, seeing the freedom and success of the states which preserved the separation of church and state, repealed laws which supported their established churches in order to attract more immigrants. By 1776, the founding fathers concluded that separation of church and state had been a success, and while not using the phrase "separation of church and state," drafted the concept into the Constitution. The inclu-

[2]Ibid. p. 336.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020617

sion of separation of church and state, impressed upon James Madison by members of the Baptist church, united the Baptists and the members of other denominations to support the Constitution and ensure its adoption. Baptist support was contingent upon the addition of the First Amendment, which was speedily adopted after the adoption of the Constitution. Thus without separation of church and state, the Constitution would never have been adopted. Nevertheless, the Commission would have us believe that religious liberty did not exist in the states prior to the adoption of the Constitution, Report at 37, and that the concept of a wall of separation was the invention of Thomas Jefferson, and not central to the freedoms of our nation. They state that the idea of a wall of separation comes from a single letter, forgotten until the Supreme Court in *Everson v. Board of Education,* 1947, completely omitting the rich history of both the phrase and the idea. Report at 42.

The metaphor of creating a wall of separation between the church and the state was first written by Roger Williams in a reply to John Cotton in 1644, and then reproduced and expanded upon in his *magnum opus, The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience,* published in London in the same year.[3] Parliament banned the book. The metaphor was well known to the founding fathers, probably through the works of James Burgh, raised a Scottish Presbyterian who later became a devout Protestant dissenter. Thomas Jefferson's letter was not first quoted by the Supreme Court in 1947, but rather 68 years earlier in 1879 in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The Commission ignores a long line of Presidents who felt compelled to explicitly support the concept of a wall of separation. Besides Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, one of the primary drafters of the Constitution, said that there should be a "separation between religion and government,"[4] and that religion flourished better without government patronage.[5] George Washington's diplomats negotiated, and John Adams signed the Treaty

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[3]Roger Williams, *Mr. Cotton's Letter Lately Printed, Examined and Answered* (1644), in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams,* vol. 1, p. 108; the metaphor is reproduced and developed throughout *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Edward Bean Underhill (London: Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848), see, e.g., p. 435.

[4] James Madison, "Detached Memoranda" (c. 1817), in Elizabeth Fleet, "Madison's 'Detached Memoranda,'" William and Mary Quarterly 3 (1946): 534–568.

[5] Madison's Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822.

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of Tripoli, which stated that "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."[6] President Fillmore said that "Church and state should be separate, not only in form, but fact. Religion and politics should not be mingled."[7] President Grant said, "Keep the church and the state forever separate."[8] President Garfield said that it would be dangerous to use public funds for religious schools and that "The separation of the Church and the State in everything relating to taxation should be absolute."[9] President Theodore Roosevelt said there must be "complete severance of Church and State."[10]

In attacking the Supreme Court decisions of the 1940s, the Commission resorts to two tactics that cannot survive scrutiny: a personal attack on Justice Hugo Black, and claims of philosophical influence that the timeline of history makes impossible. The Commission states "Even a few Supreme Court decisions seemed to track with this train of thought [defined earlier in the report as that of Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, and the belief that 'God is dead'], culminating in a 1947 opinion [*Everson*], in which Justice Hugo Black, a former Ku Klux Klan member, repurposed a metaphor coined by Thomas Jefferson in an attempt to legitimize the new critical philosophy by placing it in the constitutional tradition. Specifically, the Supreme Court ruled on a series of decisions in which it used the 'wall' metaphor to regulate a child's access to religious education and later to ban school prayer and public displays of religion (like the Ten Commandments)." Report at 41-42. Without any support for the notion that Justice Black wrote opinions in accordance with the anti-Catholic philosophies of the Klan, the Commission attempts to persuade the public that Justice Black was racist and that his opinions should be disregard-

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[6] Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the United States and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, art. 11, signed Nov. 4, 1796; ratified by the U.S. Senate June 7, 1797; proclaimed by President John Adams June 10, 1797 (Barlow translation).

[7] *The Ovation to Mr. Fillmore: Speeches of Mr. Fillmore,* 1856.

[8] Ulysses S. Grant, Address to the Society of the Army of the Tennessee, Des Moines, Iowa, Sept. 29, 1875.

[9] James A. Garfield, Letter Accepting the Republican Presidential Nomination (to Hon. George F. Hoar), July 12, 1880.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, *Fear God and Take Your Own Part* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), 361; the statement originated in T. Roosevelt's 1915 public letter opposing public funding of sectarian schools in New York.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020619

ed. This is an *ad hominem* attack commonly used in the highly charged political debates of today, but counterproductive to finding truth and establishing unity. It is only useful in persuading the uninformed. The suggestion that *Everson* "tracked" with Nietzsche, Foucault, Sartre, or later critical theory is historically implausible. Foucault's major works postdated *Everson*, Sartre was never a source of American Establishment Clause doctrine, and the Court grounded its reasoning in American sources: Madison, Jefferson, disestablishment, and the First Amendment tradition. To attempt to smear the Supreme Court with Justice Black's much earlier Klan membership and with Nietzsche, Foucault, and Sartre is disingenuous. While Justice Black held that the Constitution established a wall of separation between the church and the state, in the same decision, the decision attacked by the Commission, Justice Black held that government reimbursement for transportation to Catholic schools was constitutional. How ironic! The Commission faults Justice Black for anti-Catholic bias from his Klan past, yet the very decision it attacks is one in which he upheld government support benefiting Catholic schoolchildren. And it faults him for following philosophies that no serious legal historian would argue influenced the Court's reasoning.

The Commission correctly states that much of the hostility towards religion in America today is based upon a "broader cultural assumption that religious belief should remain invisible while secular ideologies enjoy full freedom to influence public institutions." Report at 21. The Commission is correct to say, "People of faith should not be required to leave their religious convictions behind when entering the workplace, engaging in commerce, serving their communities, or participating in public debate," and that "institutions should foster environments in which citizens with divergent convictions can work together while maintaining fidelity to conscience." Report at 21. Nevertheless, the Report goes on to continually overstate the case by saying that the "wall of separation" ideology creates a wall between personal faith and public life. While this may be true when the idea of a wall of separation is misconstrued and weaponized by secular atheists, it is not true that the wall of separation erected by the Constitution and so often referred to by generations of leaders who have gone before us is a wall between personal faith and public life. The true wall of separation is between the state and the church. It is

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there so that a person can freely exercise their personal faith and freely engage in the public sphere, without prejudice or persecution. To deny that there is complete separation of church and state in the Constitution, aka "the wall," and to deny that the wall can serve a useful purpose in protecting individual freedom is un-American and counter to both our experience and the knowledge and intent of our forefathers. The wall of separation is not a wall between religious people and public life; it is a wall between ecclesiastical power and civil power, protecting both religion and civil freedom.

The Commission's Objectionable Recommendations

Based upon the above arguments, the Commission recommends that the United States adopt its recommendation to post in the workplace, to teach our students, and to teach as many citizens as possible that the Constitution neither creates nor requires the separation of church and state, and that there should be no wall of separation between church and state. If this false ideology is embraced by the people, it will allow for many different "reforms," and eventually be used to justify any oppressive religious legislation so long as it is for the good of the people or represents the will of the majority. This is a radical teaching that has the potential, over time, to roll back the freedoms we enjoy in this nation, and return us to the political conflicts and tyranny our forefathers came to America to escape. This is the underlying philosophical foundation of additional, objectionable recommendations that the Commission makes.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious philanthropic organizations. It bases its argument on the idea that in times of need, to separate the physical help from spiritual help is to deny the full scope of the help that the person in need requires. This may be true in some circumstances. Nevertheless, this is an argument to the church that wishes to provide those services to fund them internally, and not rely upon the state. For religion to rely upon state funding is for religion to take the role of an imposter, pretending to provide aid, when in fact it is the state that is making the aid possible. It also allows the religion that is relying upon government funding to use that funding as an

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aid in indoctrination and evangelism, thus the government is not remaining neutral. The Commission argues that church members today must leave their religious beliefs at home to engage in humanitarian work. That should never be true for work that they do without the aid of the state, and should only be true to the extent the state is providing them assistance. This is for the protection of religion as much as it is for the state and its citizens. Anytime government money is available, a religion will modify its beliefs to adhere to the values of the government so that it can obtain funds. Public money always brings public control. Furthermore, different religions may claim fairness requires equal funding, even though they do not provide equal services. This certainly will devolve into a quagmire that the state would do well to avoid.

The Commission recommends that the United States support religious education. All the reasons against supporting religious philanthropy apply here, as well as additional reasons. The Commission argues correctly that the state benefits from a religious people. But the Commission errs in thinking the state can be involved in making people religious. In education, it is important what is taught. By supporting religious education, the state will be making decisions about what doctrines can be taught. This most commonly takes the form of accreditation. Many sectarian schools are not accredited for this reason. But it can go further. Will the state support a school whose religion teaches interracial marriage is a sin, or that women should not receive higher education? Will the state support a school that teaches polygamy? What about a school that doesn't teach many things, like the Amish? This puts the state into the business of determining what values are worth supporting and what values are not. Don't think that the decisions will only be required for that which may seem obvious to us today. Today the Commission is recommending that the Ten Commandments be posted in schools and courthouses. Which Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments of Exodus or Deuteronomy? One is more Jewish focused, one more focused on creation, both requiring the keeping of the seventh day, not the first day? Or maybe the Ten Commandments of a Roman Catholic catechism, which a Protestant will tell you dispenses with the law against graven images and a Catholic priest will tell you merely divides the commandments differently. Or maybe the state can just abbreviate the Ten Commandments, number

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them like a Protestant, and hope everybody is happy. That is the solution in Texas. Texas is getting into the business of doctrine. A government that refuses to fund religious doctrine is not thereby endorsing secularism, rather, it is refusing to decide religious questions. That restraint is not hostility to religion; it is the condition under which religious communities remain free and prosperous.

The Commission has one more recommendation that has the potential to expand the breach in the wall of separation. The Commission recommends repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment prohibits churches from engaging in partisan politics, specifically supporting a candidate for election. It does not prohibit the church from speaking on the issues of the day, or even telling its members how to vote regarding issues, such as abortion and the right to life. What would repealing the Amendment do? Churches would become fabulous non-profit vehicles to engage in political activities. Pastors are known to exhibit tremendous sway over their congregations. It is not hard to imagine the intense pressure that a pastor could feel to deliver his congregation's votes for money. It is not hard to imagine that wealthy and powerful interests might attempt to influence political causes through the churches. Combine that with a patronage system whereby the congregations could receive government grants based upon the Commission's other recommendations, and there is a recipe for disaster. What failing congregation won't make a little compromise for a little financial gain? As scripture says, "the love of money is the root of all evil." 1 Timothy 6:10 KJV. As financial interests invade the churches, invariably the public will be able to smell hypocrisy, and any gains either the church or the state thinks may be had by their union will be lost. Only a dead, lifeless church on government life support will remain.

Today, the Johnson Amendment is already being dismantled by non-enforcement. In *National Religious Broadcasters v. Bessent*, the IRS and several religious plaintiffs proposed a settlement that would have substantially narrowed enforcement of the Johnson Amendment as applied to churches. This settlement was opposed by the Baptist Joint Committee and Americans United, two reputable religious liberty advocacy organizations, not secular humanists. A federal district court found that it lacked juris-

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diction on March 31, 2026. The effort to remove the barrier between tax-exempt churches and partisan campaign activity is expected to continue. The Commission should reverse its recommendation for repealing the Johnson Amendment, and instead, recommend its enforcement.

The Commission Correctly Identifies a Peril, but Not the Solution

Commissioner Bishop Robert Barron made an important observation about secularism. He said, "[T]here's a philosophical issue which is secularism proposing itself as some kind of neutral ground, but it's not neutral ground. Secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system. It wants to dominate the whole of life and therefore to exclude religion [from the public square]." Report at 181. Commissioner Kelly Shackelford makes a particularly insightful comment that "the one thing a totalitarian regime will never allow is citizens who hold an allegiance to one higher than the government. So, whenever that type of power of coalescing comes together, the first flashpoint is always going to be religious freedom. And if you lose there, you will lose everything else. So, what we're really dealing with here is the precipice of all our freedoms." Report at 29. This should be particularly sobering when combined with the Commission's observation that "contemporary progressive opposition to religious liberty … seek[s] freedom for its own views but coercion of religious groups whose traditional beliefs conflict with current trends such as transgenderism." Report at 35-36. The Commission is correct in urging the courts to view atheism and atheistic determinism as ideologically and functionally similar to religion. Just as secularism as an ideology is a totalizing system, religion, when granted power, tends toward the same result. Combining church and state together, financially or otherwise, will result in one or the other demanding power and control over the other. History has shown us that the stronger the bond between church and state, the more oppressed the society. The union of church and state is the recipe for the kind of totalitarian regime warned about by Commissioner Shackelford. This is not a new discovery. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, John Adams wrote, "Checks and Ballances, Jefferson, however you and your Party may have ridiculed them, are our only Security, for the progress of Mind, as well as the Security of Body.—Every Species of these Christians would persecute Deists, as Soon as either

DOJ-RLC Comment-020624

Sect would persecute another, if it had unchecked and unballanced Power. Nay, the Deists would persecute Christians, and Atheists would persecute Deists, with as unrelenting Cruelty, as any Christians would persecute them or one another. Know thyself, human Nature!"[11] The church and state should remain forever apart, neutral towards each other, and neutral towards secularism.

Finally, the country as a whole should not be swayed by arguments made for religion in the military. It is true, the military should be very careful not to support or oppose any religion, but it is also true that the military must be able to provide religious services to its members. The reason they must provide those services is that in the military, especially when deployed, there are no alternative means to obtain religious services. A service member deployed in a foreign land may not be able to go to the local Baptist, Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, or Mormon church, or synagogue or mosque, because they may not exist in the area, nor would it necessarily be safe to go off base to attend one.

Conclusion

Just before and after the Revolution, the disestablishment of the state churches was an important project of our founding fathers. It was not without controversy. The experience of it should not be lost upon us.

Reverend Lyman Beecher was a Congregationalist minister, one of the most influential evangelical preachers of the early 1800s, and a leader in the movement to maintain the established church of Connecticut. Before 1818, he argued for the need of an established church. He said, "So the democracy, as it rose, included nearly all the minor sects, besides the Sabbath-breakers, rum-selling tippling folk, infidels, and ruff-scuff generally, and made a dead set at us of the standing order." He believed that an es-

[11] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 25 June 1813, Founders Online, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-06-02-0202. [Original source: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813, ed. J. Jefferson Looney. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 226–229.]

DOJ-RLC Comment-020625

tablished church was the only way to counteract these evil influences. In 1818, Connecticut voted to disestablish its church. Beecher described the experience. "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." He went on to observe, "They say ministers have lost their influence; the fact is, they have gained. By voluntary efforts, societies, missions, and revivals, they exert a deeper influence than ever they could by queues, and shoe buckles, and cocked hats, and golden-headed canes."[12]

Tocqueville observed on his trip to America, "When I arrived in the United States, it was the country's religious aspect that first captured my attention."[13] By speaking to Americans, he learned religion flourished *because* of the complete separation of church and state, not in spite of it. That is precisely the lesson the Commission would have the nation unlearn, or rather, learn again the hard way.

The Commission is wrong to treat separation of church and state as a modern innovation. In America, the separation of church and state formed the foundation of our dearest freedoms, supported by Baptists, dissenters, and citizens of every faith, vindicated by disestablishment, and praised by foreign observers as religion and freedom thrived together.

As Roger Williams warned, freedom of conscience must be defended: "Having bought truth dear, we must not sell it cheap, nor the least grain of it for the whole world, no not for the saving of souls, though our own most precious…"[14]

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[12] *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, D.D.*, ed. Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), 1:344–345.

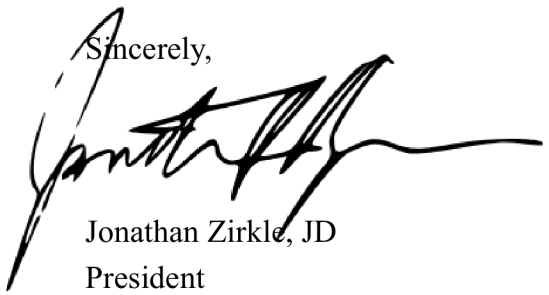
[13] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Library of America, 2004, p. 340.

[14] Roger Williams, *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience*, ed. Richard Groves (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), p. 9.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020626

For all of the foregoing reasons, I respectfully ask that the Commission revise its account of American history and withdraw or substantially modify its recommendations. America will do best to forever maintain a complete separation of church and state.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Zirkle, JD
President

PII

DOJ-RLC Comment-020627

From: Diane Carter <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious Liberty Concerns
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:45:01 -0400
Importance: Normal

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington DC 20500 USA

July 13, 2026

From: Ms. Diane Carter, private Canadian / British Citizen

To: The Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

To Whom it may Concern,

I am writing today as a faithful Seventh-Day Adventist Christian living in Canada. While it may at first appear that the political happenings in the USA have little if anything to do with a Christian living in Canada I must disagree; kindly allow me to briefly explain my concerns.

I am opposed to the recent conclusion of the ***Religious Liberty Commission*** associated with the administration of President Donald J. Trump, held on April 13 in Washington DC., which concluded that ***there is no true or absolute separation between church and state***. I do NOT agree with this conclusion.

The principles of Scripture, the Constitution of the USA and the horrific testimony of world history all affirm that liberty of conscience can only be preserved where there is a clear and firm **distinction** between the authority of the state and the authority of God, the Bible declares:

Matthew 22:21 Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

There are 2 distinctions noted:

1) Government (Caesar / Presidential Administration) entrusted by the people with responsibilities such as maintaining public order and collecting taxes, etc.

2) God. He alone has authority over worship, conscience and the loyalty of the individual soul

A person's conscience belongs to God alone; therefore, no human government has the right to force or coerce belief, compel worship or regulate religious practice in any way whatsoever as this steps into territory which belongs to God alone. The decision to worship is a private matter between an individual and his/her God and cannot be legislated. True love and worship come from a personal relationship with God which brings forth respect and an intelligent understanding of our Creator. Legislation of worship in any manner whatsoever will not produce a character change, which to be sure is exactly what this world needs at this time in history. As prophesied, Christian history such as the 1,260 years we know as the dark ages between AD 538 – AD 1798 provides us a somber warning of what happens when church and state unite regardless of the reasonings.

All human attempts to legislate and coerce worship and obedience inevitably end in violence and death to those who wish to follow their God-given conscience rather than that which is legislated by the governing bodies of the day.

The Holy Spirit of God alone is able to work on the heart of man with his/her cooperation and consent, to produce the change necessary to be at one with God. The government must stay clear of interference or receive the wrath of God described in Scripture. God has not given any man the right to rule the conscience of another. Coercion, for any reason is NOT consent. It is ungodly. Anti-Christ in nature and never sanctioned or approved by God.

Liberty of conscience is vital, precious and deserving of protection at all times. Did not the pilgrims seek freedom from state-controlled religion? Did they not pursue separation of church and state in order to avoid the misery and tyranny such as they had experienced in Europe? They longed to worship freely as their conscience directed…not as the government dictated. "*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it*" George Santayana. If we are prudent students of history we will do all in our power to avoid repeating the catastrophe of the past. True faith cannot exist without freedom.

The Declaration of Independence states "All are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among which is liberty" As I understand this language, the government must neither establish religion nor must it interfere with the free exercise of a person to follow his/her religious belief.

Therefore, I support Religious Liberty. I support the Free Exercise of Faith. I support the Separation of Church and State. I oppose ANY union of church and state.

Although I live North of the border, history and Scripture alike warn that the decisions of one nation can quickly and devastatingly affect ALL people in time. So, it is with a somber and concerned heart that I share my concerns with you my precious neighbor to the South. It IS within your jurisdiction and power at this time in history to stand for liberty for all. So many have died for the freedoms your nation enjoys. I respectfully ask you to consider humbly the consequences of the actions you are about to undertake.

Respectfully,

Diane Carter

Diane Carter

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me...Philippians 4:13

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church & State - Elizabeth Steinweg
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:49:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Commission:

I am a Bible-believing Christian and member of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. In the tradition of my spiritual forebears, I strongly oppose any action to weaken the "wall" of separation between church and state. Christianity has flourished in the United States for 250 years precisely because of this separation. From the very earliest days of European colonization of this land, religious minority sects, including the Baptists and Anabaptists, found refuge here from persecution in nations where the distinction between church and state was blurred or did not exist. The history of persecution and the firm beliefs of numerous Christian denominations and groups informed the founders of this nation, including James Madison, who penned the glorious First Amendment, which articulates our most treasured and sacred rights, and arguably defines the cornerstone of what indeed has made this nation "great" and drawn millions of hard-working people to its shores.

Secularism has too often taken the form of a militant anti-Christian force in academia and the media, attacking the expressions of those whose beliefs are informed by a Biblicial worldview. When instances of persecution arise on account of expressions of faith or actions taken that are informed by faith, the government must seek to protect such expressions and actions. However, history informs us that allowing the government's hand in promoting faith does not result in the greater flourishing of faith. Violating the Establishment Clause often results in violation of the Free Exercise Clause. We can look to the earliest examples of such attempts in America as in Massachusetts Bay Colony, where dissenters were punished and clerics who preached "heretical" doctrine were banished. Hence Roger Williams fled and eventually founded Rhode Island Colony, where religious freedom was guaranteed to Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and atheist alike.

A recent example of how violating the Establishment Clause resulted in violation of the Free Exercise Clause can be found in your Commission’s own history. Carrie Prejean, informed by her Catholic faith, expressed concerns with how Zionism is impacting United States policy toward Israel and our military actions, including the Iran War which has cost American lives. Members of your Commission found her expressions offensive, and the result was that she was CANCELED. This illustrates the fact that uniting "church" and "state" results in the "state" being forced to decide religious doctrine, and marginalizing or canceling those who do not conform.

Making taxpayers fund religious organizations as well as repealing the Johnson Amendment are equally bad ideas that will result in weakening the true witness of Christian churches, whose Leader's entire life illustrated the fact that His Kingdom is not of this world.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Steinweg

From: Bryan Steinweg <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church & State - Bryan Steinweg
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:50:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Commission:

I am a Bible-believing Christian and member of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. In the tradition of my spiritual forebears, I strongly oppose any action to weaken the "wall" of separation between church and state. Christianity has flourished in the United States for 250 years precisely because of this separation. From the very earliest days of European colonization of this land, religious minority sects, including the Baptists and Anabaptists, found refuge here from persecution in nations where the distinction between church and state was blurred or did not exist. The history of persecution and the firm beliefs of numerous Christian denominations and groups informed the founders of this nation, including James Madison, who penned the glorious First Amendment, which articulates our most treasured and sacred rights, and arguably defines the cornerstone of what indeed has made this nation "great" and drawn millions of hard-working people to its shores.

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Making taxpayers fund religious organizations as well as repealing the Johnson Amendment are equally bad ideas that will result in weakening the true witness of Christian churches, whose Leader's entire life illustrated the fact that His Kingdom is not of this world.

Sincerely,

Bryan Steinweg

From: Randy Lackey <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Liberty
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 20:54:02 -0400
Importance: Normal

I love the Seventh Day Adventist Church. We believe in separation of church and state. The spirit of prophecy and understanding and believing the word of God thru out the bible from beginning to end holds dear to our hearts. The government must allow us and others to practice our faith in fairness with out the fear of being persecuted because of.

Best Regards,
Sent from my iPhone

From: Esther Ladella <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment - Separation of Church and State - Esther Ladella
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:31:27 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm thankful for this opportunity to write to you. As a United States Citizen and as a Seventh-day Adventist I value religious freedom. I applaud the commission for taking steps to ensure religious freedom for all in the report. This is the fundamental right of every human being whether they are religious or non-religious, believer or unbeliever.

With the aforementioned stance, I ask that the Johnson Amendment be not removed or repealed but be fully enforced. Religious organizations influencing our current political state may lead to repetition of the atrocities practiced during the dark ages where church and state combined brought in persecution to whoever did not agree to the tenants of a particular belief. If there is a chance in the future where, repealing the Johnson Amendment now would give place to merging of church and state in any semblance and thereby prevent the practice of religious liberty, please consider this carefully.

In human nature there needs to be checks and balances. "It was the desire for liberty of conscience that inspired the Pilgrims to brave the perils of the long journey across the sea, to endure the hardships and dangers of the wilderness, and with God's blessing to lay, on the shores of America, the foundation of a mighty nation. 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... Said one of the leading ministers in the colony of Massachusetts Bay: "It was toleration that made the world antichristian; and the church never took harm by the punishment of heretics." 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, all the people being required to contribute to the support of the clergy, and 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." As George Santayana wrote "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Moreover, an example of caution as what can happen when a door is opened that may seem right in the current situation to offset a pendulum shift that had occurred, consider this portion of the history in the life and experience of Roger Williams. "Eleven years after the planting of the first colony, Roger Williams came to the New World. Like the early Pilgrims, he came to enjoy religious freedom; but unlike them, he saw—what so few in his time had yet seen—that this freedom was the inalienable right of all, whatever might be their creed. He was an earnest seeker for truth, with Robinson holding it impossible that all the light from God's Word had yet been received. Williams "was the first person in modern Christendom to assert, in its plenitude, the doctrine of the liberty of conscience, the equality of opinions before the law." He declared it to be the duty of the magistrate to restrain crime, but never to control the conscience. "The public or the magistrates may decide," he said, "what is due from men to men, but when they attempt to prescribe a man's duty to God, they are out of place, and there can be no safety; for it is clear that if the magistrate has the power, he may decree one set of opinions or beliefs today and another tomorrow; as has been done in England by different kings and queens, and by the different popes and councils in the Roman Church; so that belief would become a heap of confusion." What we decide now will affect our future state and so let us not just examine the past 250 years but consider and study beyond to the hundreds and thousands of years not to repeat what will infringe and bring persecution.

In trying to fix one aspect, let us be careful not to create another problem in the future.

Freedom of speech and freedom of religion is an individual right offered by the constitution. Please consider the case of Carrie Prejean where her stating the well documented fact that Jews killed Jesus is taken as anti-semitic. If in my history, my ancestors have treated a group unfairly or even killed a certain member, the fact remains a fact. Even God allowed in the history of Jesus, to have a record of King David's act of murder. That doesn't condemn Jesus. History has recorded atrocities of several groups, being imperfect. It would be prudent for us to be humble knowing that in each one of us exists an element that wants to protect one's reputation above others or one group above others. God is not respecter of persons. In being so we often are more gracious to our own shortcomings or shortcomings of a preferred/known group than to extend the same freedom and right to others. Let us not allow ourselves to be ruled by that element and be fair whether we agree or not. If the history states that a certain group killed a certain person, it doesn't give us a right to change that history nor does it give us right to execute judgment on the current group. Children should not be condemned for the sins of their parents. God is the only true judge. By singling out a particular group and providing special treatment to them above others is not fair. We must extend the same protection to all groups including those who disagree with other groups. Please keep neutrality in regard to religious groups. Allow religious expression to all without penalty if the intent of this commission is to protect religious expression in the workplace and in the government. My appeal is to lead by example as "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much"; lest a small inconsistency in oppressing one's religious belief reveals hypocrisy and defeats and neutralizes the true purpose of this cause (religious liberty for all).

In summary, my appeal is not to repeal Johnson Amendment and to remain neutral in relationship with religion/religious group and protect religious expression for all.

Thank you for your time and for your service in hearing all the testimonies from public, military, and religious stances.

Sincerely,
Esther

From: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Religious freedom opposed to church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 21:38:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the religious liberty commission: I am totally opposed to the unity of church and state…I am a member of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church…we do not follow the religious dictates of man, kings or pope's but believe all people have the free will right to choose how to and when to worship, and the freedom to share the gospel with anyone wherever we go. 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 to step into partisan politics, the corruption of politics comes in with it. Churches end up competing for funding and answering to politicians instead of our Creator—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, Daniel Barrett
Rainier, Washington

From: Jorge Fonseca <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Asunto: PUBLIC COMMENT – Establishment Clause – Jorge Fonseca
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:14:20 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

My name is Jorge Fonseca, and I am a Seventh-day Adventist Christian from Lima, Peru. Although I do not live in the United States, I have long admired the American constitutional commitment to religious liberty and the separation of church and state. These principles have inspired people around the world who value freedom of conscience.

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I appreciate the Commission's efforts to strengthen protections for the free exercise of religion, including workplace accommodations and conscience rights. These protections are important for believers of every faith.

At the same time, I am respectfully concerned about the recommendations that would weaken the Establishment Clause by encouraging government-sponsored religious instruction or mandatory displays of the Ten Commandments in public schools. History has repeatedly shown that when civil government becomes involved in promoting religion, religious minorities eventually suffer. The separation of church and state does not weaken religion; it protects both religion and government.

My church has a long history of defending religious liberty for everyone, not only for Seventh-day Adventists. We believe that faith must always be a matter of personal conviction and never of government authority. The role of the state is to protect the freedom of every individual to believe, worship, or not worship according to conscience.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Commission to preserve a strong Establishment Clause while continuing to support robust protections for the free exercise of religion. Both principles work together to safeguard religious liberty for all.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully,

Jorge Fonseca
Lima, Peru

From: Melecia Miller <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Chapter 8 - Religious Liberty for Religious Leaders
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:24:47 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Chair, Vice-chair, and other members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

May the grace and peace of our Creator Jesus Christ be with you.

I am writing to express my concerns about the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Commission report, particularly recommendation 9 - repeal the Johnson Amendment which is discussed in chapter 8 of the report.

I am against repealing the Johnson Amendment. The Administration should NOT support legislation such as the Free Speech Fairness Act which is incorrectly based on the idea that the Johnson Amendment is unconstitutional.

It is self-evident and obvious that our Creator has endowed us with inalienable rights - life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Separation of church and state supports these basic human rights. Our Creator does not enforce worship and He also does not give the government authority to enforce worship or support one religious group over others. He only accepts worship that is freely given. When the government merges with the state, we destroy the societal environment that fosters the free will worship of God.

The well-being and blessings of the United States of America are based on the separation of church and state. This allows all individuals to worship God (or not), whoever or however they perceive Him to be, and to freely share their beliefs as well as freely reject or accept the offers/proselytization of those who share their personal beliefs (Joshua 24:15). This freedom of choice and individual autonomy is a great gift of God. The government should not trample on these natural rights by merging with the state. God does not accept forced worship.

Additionally, if the government funds religious organizations, churches and schools, the government can then dictate the religious beliefs of the organizations, churches, and schools that receive these funds.

The state of Rhode Island was founded because Roger Williams saw that the need for the separation of state was essential and obvious. Without this separation, grievous religious persecution and torture is sure to take place and destroy human life. Historically, this has happened in many countries throughout the world, and still continues today in various parts of the world. Religious persecution is a horrible crime and sin which should not happen anywhere, and not in the United States. We cannot take steps to foster its development.

May God bless you all.

Sincerely,

Melecia, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian currently from the state of Georgia and formerly from the state of Massachusetts

> ***"By what gentle degrees does God prepare us for His will!"***

--- John Wesley

Sent with Proton Mail secure email.

From: Ryan Long <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Response to the RLC Report
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:51:21 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

My name is Ryan Long, and I'm writing in response to the Religious Liberty Commission report and want to share my concerns. I pastor two Seventh-day Adventist Churches in Texas. Our denomination finds itself in the religious minority with several of our beliefs regarding the teachings of Scripture, and as such, I am a strong supporter of religious freedom in all aspects of our society today. Below I've bolded the highlights of my concerns if it's difficult to read the whole statement, and at the end I've included a personal experience.

My biggest concern is the main premise behind the report, that "separation of church and state" is unconstitutional. In my view, the mistake of the commission is that, in pushing back against secular atheism and it's attempts to re-define the "state" as the "public square," **the commission has gone too far and its recommendations, if followed, will lead to an erosion in religious freedom, and potentially a "union of church and state**." **And while the commission's report is more politically correct, in the commission's hearing, members of the commission were more direct, even stating that, "There is no separation of church and state" and stating that bumper stickers should be made to this effect.**

In the phrase "separation of church and state", I agree with the Religious Liberty Commission that the word "state" was never intended to mean the "public square," but instead, it meant there should be a wall of separation between the church and the government for the purpose of maintaining religious freedom. **The effect of the commission's work and report, and the demonizing of separation of church and state, lays the foundation for our government to actually undermine religious liberty.**

It is also very concerning to me that the report suggests that we build bridges between church and state, and it even has the gall to suggest that this is precisely what religious liberty is and what it should do. History has shown us what the uniting of church and state looks like, and it's not good. In fact, union of church and state (and the persecution that resulted) was one of the main motivations for people to come to this land even before our nation's founding. Ultimately when church and state are united, the church (or at least the majority) ends up controlling the state, and dissenters (even religious dissenters) end up being persecuted. It's a very slippery slope. **I respectfully request that the commission reconsider their attacks on "separation of church and state," and instead affirm "separation of church and state," which is reflected in the First Amendment of the Constitution.**

There are other concerns that I have with the report, but besides what I've addressed above, **the biggest of my concerns is the recommendation to repeal the Johnson Amendment**. The Religious Liberty Commission misrepresented the origins of the Johnson Amendment to cast a negative light on it. And **if this amendment is repealed, it will open the door for the church to wield influence over the state through endorsements and donations**. The name of the game in politics is, "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours." The repealing of the Johnson Amendment would make it very difficult for true freedom of religion to continue. **Some religious organizations are already calling for things like legislation of the first four of the Ten Commandments, making**

a requirement that you must be Christian to run for public office, and a host of other things of this nature. Mix these things together with political endorsements and political funding from these same organizations, and it's a recipe for the crumbling of religious freedom.

A short story in closing. I served on a Christian Ministerial Alliance several years ago. It was around the same time that there was an attack on the Biblical view of marriage, and while I support the Biblical view of marriage, I was opposed to the stance that the Ministerial Alliance wanted to take on the issue. The Ministerial Alliance wanted to alter it's membership documents to exclude any minister that didn't support a Biblical view of marriage, that marriage is between a man and a woman. While I very much support that view of marriage, I was the only pastor present to speak against making this belief a requirement for membership in the Ministerial Alliance. And my reasoning was that if we started excluding pastors who hold different theological convictions than ourselves, we might one day find ourselves being excluded from the alliance as well. A vote was taken, and I was the only one to vote against the motion. Just a few months later, the Ministerial Alliance decided it was going to add more specificity to its "creed" and that all ministers were going to be required to sign it to continue being members. I told the Ministerial Alliance that I wanted to continue on with them but that I couldn't if the creed remained the same because there was one belief that I did not agree with. After a discussion, the group decided to change the creed to a statement that all could agree to. Those two experiences remind me to this day how important it is to embrace religious freedom.

In closing, I would just appeal to the Religious Liberty Commission and the Department of Justice to carefully consider the implications of the report of the commission and to review the above concerns and the concerns of others. If the recommendations of this report are followed, union of church and state will be the eventual result, and true religious freedom will eventually crumble here in this great country.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ryan Long, Pastor
Cresson Community Seventh-day Adventist Church &
Weatherford Seventh-day Adventist Church

--
Ryan Long, MDiv, BCC
Pastor,
Benbrook and Weatherford
Seventh-day Adventist Churches
M [redacted]

From: Dawn Walton <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - First Amendment & Minority Faiths - Dawn Walton
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:55:52 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission,

I am concerned that portions of the draft report treat the Establishment Clause primarily as an obstacle to religious expression rather than as an essential protection of religious liberty.

The First Amendment contains both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. These are not competing provisions, they work together.The Free Exercise Clause protects our right to practice our faith, while the Establishment Clause protects us from having another person's religion imposed upon us through governmental power.

The genius of the First Amendment is that it protects both religion and liberty by preventing the government from choosing winners and losers among religious beliefs.The Free Exercise Clause protects the individual's right to live according to conscience.The Establishment Clause protects every citizen from governmental preference for one religion over another. Weakening either clause ultimately weakens both.

Religious freedom includes the right to worship, speak, assemble, and live according to conscience. It also includes the right to decline worship, prayer, religious instruction, or religious observance sponsored or endorsed by the government.

Religious liberty must therefore mean more than allowing religious individuals to speak.It must also mean that the government itself does not prescribe, promote, finance, endorse, or enforce favored religious beliefs or observances.

The best test of religious liberty is not how our government treats the dominant faith. It is how our government treats the person whose conscience differs from the majority.

As a Christian, an American, and a Seventh-day Adventist, I welcome strong protections for the free exercise of religion. At the same time, history teaches us to be cautious whenever religious influence and governmental power become closely aligned.

Please preserve both commands of the First Amendment. The government must neither establish religion nor prohibit its free exercise. These two constitutional protections are strongest when they are preserved together.

Respectfully,

Dawn Walton
North Carolina

From: Dasha Alvarez <[redacted]>
To: <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Dasha Billingsley Public Comment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 22:57:12 -0400
Importance: Normal

The separation of church and state is much needed in order for our country to continue to practice religion freedom for all. Given the historical events leading up to and ultimately inspiring the development of our constitution, the wall of separation of church and state grants religious freedom for all. Let us remember the Protestant Reformation, let us revisit history and learn from the dangers of the union of church and state. There are other ways to solve the issues in our country. 1. Be honest 2. Clean up the cracks in our justice system being fair, honest, and transparent 3. Remove public money out of the church, so the church can be encouraged to stay biblical and less controlled by political leaders.
I love our country and the freedoms we have to do things that are good because we love God and others, and not because we are forced. I'm a Seventh-Day Adventist and enjoy religious freedom to rest and worship God on Sabbath, which is Saturday. This is really important to me and my family and our community. Thank you for reading my comment.

Sincerely ,

Dasha Billingsley

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: Lucas Contreras <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT -[RECOMMENDATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION] -[LUCAS CONTRERAS]
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:05:43 -0400
Importance: Normal

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the recommendations of the Religious Liberty Committee submitted to President Donald J. Trump on June 26, 2026.

I would like to share a statement I support from the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists regarding the Johnson Amendment:

“Johnson Amendment supporters view the law as an important tool in the separation of church and state. They argue that this law insulates churches from undue pressure by candidates and from political influence. Supporters also contend the law protects the electoral process from corruption via tax deductible contributions and improper use of tax exempt funds by public charities…

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America, because of its biblical beliefs and practices, does not desire to intervene in elections. Additionally, the church has opposed certain previous proposals for a full repeal of the Johnson Amendment. Therefore, while recognizing the law’s potential First Amendment concerns, the church reaffirms its opposition to legislative efforts to eliminate or weaken rules that prohibit nonprofits, including houses of worship, from endorsing or opposing candidates.“

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Lucas Contreras

Source: North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, “NAD Responds to Proposed Repeal of Johnson Amendment”
https://www.nadadventist.org/news/nad-responds-proposed-repeal-johnson-amendment/

From: Christina <christinaruchty@gmail.com>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <RLC@usdoj.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Separation of church and state
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:12:35 -0400
Importance: Normal
Attachments: Notes_260713_201106.pdf

Please see my attached letter
To whom it may concern,

I am a practicing woman of faith in God's word. I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and believe in the separation of church and state, which should never join hands. I will never bow down to or worship anyone or any idol other than my Lord and Savior in the Bible. I stand with the teachings of Daniel and Revelation as well as OT and NT. I will practice my free will of conscience that the Lord provides to all, and I will honor my body and what is put in it and on it, as well as what I eat and drink.

I will continue to exercise my Sabbath rights and follow God and His word. I will continue to exercise my rights with the Three Angels' Messages and proclaim the good word, just like many others did, including the disciples. I want to honor my Lord as He has given us life and has given us free will to choose Him. I will respect and honor people's choices, but yet pray for our nation and world that they may come to their senses and realize what is to come. The Lord is coming soon; many will be deceived and many counterfeits may arise, but keeping a personal relationship with my Lord is key. I will do His will.

Sincerely,
Christina Ruchty

July 13,2026

To whom it may concern,

I am a practicing woman of faith in God's word. I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and believe in the separation of church and state, which should never join hands. I will never bow down to or worship anyone or any idol other than my Lord and Savior in the Bible. I stand with the teachings of Daniel and Revelation as well as OT and NT. I will practice my free will of conscience that the Lord provides to all, and I will honor my body and what is put in it and on it, as well as what I eat and drink.

I will continue to exercise my Sabbath rights and follow God and His word. I will continue to exercise my rights with the Three Angels' Messages and proclaim the good word, just like many others did, including the disciples. I want

to honor my Lord as He has given us life and has given us free will to choose Him. I will respect and honor people's choices, but yet pray for our nation and world that they may come to their senses and realize what is to come. The Lord is coming soon; many will be deceived and many counterfeits may arise, but keeping a personal relationship with my Lord is key. I will do His will.

Sincerely,

Christina Ruchty



From: Nick Taliaferro <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Maintaining the historical guarantees of the First Amendment
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:32:51 -0400
Importance: Normal

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

I am writing to urge that we continue to maintain a strong firewall that will serve to separate the powers of the State from the mission and perspectives of the Religious Community.

I write this as a citizen; but even more, I write this as an ordained Seventh Day Adventist pastor (having had the privilege to fellowship with Dr Carson several times!), and as the City of Philadelphia's first Executive Director of Faith-Based Initiatives. In addition to those two positions, I also served the City of Philadelphia as the Executive Director of its Commission on Human Relations.

Generally speaking, I concur with the thoughts expressed in the Pillar of Freedom document, and steadfastly oppose any attempts to mitigate against the historical separation between these two powers working within American life.

Sincerely,

W. Nick Taliaferro
Retired Pastor/City Official
Phila. PA.

From: Robert Gray <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:47:33 -0400
Importance: Normal

I totally agree with Pillar of Freedoms comments. Please implement them.
To do otherwise would set the stage for government to eventually dictate what can and what cannot be adhered to in personal religious convictions. The government (Sate) should not be used by any religious institution to implement any religious beliefs or convictions.
Who would be the arbiter of what truth is??
I am a Seventh-Day Adventist, which means I worship on Saturday the seventh day of the week according to the 4th commandment of God, given to man in the very beginning. This belief and practice places me and a few others in the minority. Will the majority of the Christian world compel us to worship on Sunday for the good of society?
Thank you for considering my comments and concerns.
Robert Gray

From: Joe Cipriani <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comments on Religious Liberty Commission Recommendations.
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:49:00 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the esteemed members of the White House Religious Liberty Commission,

I want to thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on the committee's recommendations. I am simply a deeply devoted Christian. No special credentials beyond my love and appreciation for my Savior Jesus Christ. As such, I would like to express my deep concerns regarding the first recommendations of the committee.

The first recommendation states: "Instruct the Department of Justice to issue guidance clarifying the proper understanding of the Establishment Clause and the phrase "separation of Church and State."

This country was founded on the principle of liberty of conscience. The government has no right or authority to impose religious observance on any individual. Civil law should be based on the simple principle: 'do unto others as you would have others do unto you'. But the government should never overextend its authority into the realm of worship and praise, which belongs to God and God alone. Regardless of the god they believe in. All religious beliefs should be respected as long as they extend the same tolerance towards other religions. No one has the right to use fear, force, or threat of violence when it comes to religious worship.

I would like to remind the committee that in 1888, Senator William Blair submitted a bill to provide free public education and mandate that schools teach the basic principles of virtue and morality. The amendment also included a provision requiring national Sunday observance. Alonso T. Jones, an elder of the Seventh-day Adventist church, provided some amazing testimony. Senator Blair pointed out the bill included exemption clauses for Jews and other religious groups. A.T. Jones responded brilliantly, stating that a just law requires no exemptions. Later in the hearing, Senator Blair asked A.T. Jones if he would still object if the day was changed from Sunday to Saturday. I am sure Senator Blair was shocked when A.T. Jones stated he would object to this just as vigorously. Citing freedom of conscience.

Any time church and state unite to dictate what and how someone should worship and praise God, it will always lead first to intolerance. Intolerance will lead to persecution, including denying the right to provide for family, imprisonment, torture, and death. This is always the result, even if the efforts begin with good intentions.

The sad truth of history is that the Christian church has caused the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob to be misunderstood because of its religious intolerance. The brutality of the Spanish Inquisition is just one of many examples.

As my final statement. Bible prophecy will come true. The Mark of the Beast will occur when church and state unite to impose civil laws that create a counterfeit to the Ten Commandments, with specific attention to the first four commandments, which Christians and Jews alike summarize as love God. The Jews during Christ's time replaced God's law with rabbinical tradition. They started out with good intentions by providing instruction on how to obey God's commandments. Unfortunately, they relied on imposed rules that govern outward behavior, but did not bring about any change in the human heart. Ultimately, the religious leaders turned to the Roman Empire to have Christ crucified. Church and state united. Catholic and Protestant churches alike repeated this same pattern. If my understanding is correct, America will at some point lead the way for the mark of the beast. Bible prophecy will come true. But it does not have to be you who contributes to it. I would hope that Ben

Carson would remember his Christian roots as a Seventh-day Adventist. Not by might. Not by power. But by my spirit, says the Lord.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns. I leave it in your hands to hopefully do what is right in the eyes of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who loved us so much He died for us rather than force us to follow and worship him.

Sincerely,
Joe Cipriani

From: Celina Nicole Grant <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Public Comment Regarding Religious Liberty and the Separation of Church and State
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:49:07 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing as a concerned citizen to express my strong support for the constitutional principles of religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

The First Amendment protects both the free exercise of religion and against the establishment of religion by the government. These protections have enabled people of all faiths—and those of no faith—to live according to their convictions without government coercion or favoritism.

As a person of faith and proud Seventh-Day Adventist, I believe the true God of Heaven and Earth never forces worship upon anyone. From the beginning, God has given humanity the gift of free will, allowing each person the freedom to choose whether to love, worship, and obey Him. Genuine faith cannot exist where there is coercion. Worship that is compelled by civil authority is contrary to the very character of God, who invites rather than forces, and who desires willing hearts rather than compelled obedience.

For this reason, I respectfully urge the Department of Justice to continue defending the constitutional principles that preserve religious liberty for all Americans. Government should neither compel religious observance nor favor one faith tradition over another. The separation of church and state is not opposition to religion; it is a safeguard that protects the God-given freedom of conscience of every individual.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that when civil and religious authority become intertwined, the rights and liberties of minorities are often diminished. The Constitution wisely establishes limits that protect both religious freedom and civil government. A government that remains neutral in matters of religion is best positioned to protect the rights of all people, regardless of their beliefs.

I respectfully ask the Department of Justice to uphold these constitutional protections and to ensure that every American remains free to worship according to conscience—or not to worship at all—without coercion, discrimination, or government-imposed religious mandates.

Thank you for your time, your consideration of these comments, and your continued commitment to defending the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States.

Respectfully,

Mrs. Celina Nicole Grant
Philadelphia, PA

From: R K Heinrich <[redacted]>
To: [redacted]
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT—Separation of Church and State—Rebecca Heinrich
Date: Mon, 13 Jul 2026 23:55:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I am very concerned about the Religious Liberty Commission's stance on Separation of Church and State. The intent sounds good, but the long term implications are not going to play out well. I believe the First Amendment and the Constitution are time honored documents to be upheld and followed (as is), without government interference in religious matters of faith.

God bless America!

Rebecca Heinrich
Ridgecrest, CA

From: Mike Horn <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on proposals by the Presidential Religious Liberty Commission
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 2026 00:08:26 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission:

I'm disturbed by the Commission's proposal to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge." As a person of faith (I'm a Seventh Day Adventist) and a student of religious history, I think what you propose is dangerous for our churches and our country and government.

In the words of Roger Williams that harken back to Eden, "the garden of the church" needs to be protected by "a wall" from "the wilderness of the state." Williams is the founder of Rhode Island, the first colony in America to separate church and state. Fleeing persecution in England, Williams came first to the Puritan's Boston Bay colony well recommended as a Cambridge-educated Puritan minister who had served many years as the protégé of renown English legislator and jurist Edward Cooke. In his formative years, Williams saw many sincere believers persecuted for their religious convictions when they refused to conform to changes in key church doctrines and practices set and reset by the English crown. These experiences made him into a strong advocate of "soul liberty." As a devout Puritan, he believed government had no role in enforcing the first four commandments, which spell out how people are to relate to God. He believed the role of government was limited to enforcing civil laws inspired by the other six commandments, which spell out how people are to relate to other people. This separation of church and state—each person is free to decide how they relate to God with government limited to the civil sphere—was Williams' primary point of dispute with the Puritans when he was forced to flee in the dead of winter to escape a party who sought to silence him on this. The Puritans themselves fled to Boston Bay to escape religious persecution in England. Puritan leader John Winthrop, inspired by Israel's early years when it was governed by ordained judges rather than kings, sought to create a "New Jerusalem" at the Boston Bay colony where church leaders determined both the colony's rules of community life and religious practices. Winthrop's mistake was that he thought he could establish a theocratic state that joined together colony and church governance like Biblical Israel. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see the Puritan's decision to empower the civil magistrate to police religious uniformity in the colony led to the persecution of many sincere people of faith, including Roger Williams. Rhode Island welcomed many people of faith fleeing persecution, including Jews, Quakers, and Anabaptists. There they could live side by side as neighbors. Rhode Island is the most recognizably "American" of the early pre-colonial era colonies in large part because of its model of religious liberty that clearly separated the practice of faith from the civil sphere as Williams intended. Hardly anyone today looks back favorably on the Puritan colony and what it became—a place where sincere religious dissent was silenced and persecuted.

I'm against repealing the Johnson Amendment because it keeps the money in politics and related corruption out of churches. I wouldn't want to see churches become venues where ministers accept donations in exchange for plugging a candidate ahead of election day. Even worse, churches could begin to compete for candidate donations by parroting their narratives from the pulpit, causing many non-believers to see churches as corrupted by money and politics. Of course, ministers should be able to talk to their congregations about social issues and values like religious liberty that Christians hold dear. The Johnson Amendment should not obstruct

this. I'm also against using government money to fund religious activities because it could weaken the resistance of churches against government attempts to police their expressions of faith. Separation of churches from government has kept religion vibrant and authentic in this country. As a believer, I believe the gospel has enough power on its own to call people back to faith. We only need government to protect our first amendment rights to free exercise while ensuring the US remains a country without a national church.

For the above reasons, I urge you to reconsider your proposal to replace the wall of separation between church and state with a "bridge" joining churches with the state. Free churches do not need government conferred privileges and money to prosper.

From: Marilyn Rivera <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Importance of Religious Liberty
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 2026 00:08:30 -0400
Importance: Normal

To whom it may concern:

The principle of the separation of church and state is one of the most important safeguards of religious liberty. From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, this principle is not only a constitutional value but also a biblical one. God created human beings with the freedom to choose whether to follow Him. Genuine faith cannot be compelled by laws or government authority; it must be a voluntary response of the heart.

Throughout history, the union of church and state has often led to persecution, discrimination, and the suppression of religious freedom. When one religion or denomination gains political power, those with different beliefs frequently suffer. During the Middle Ages, for example, dissenting Christians who rejected the teachings of the established church were often imprisoned, tortured, or executed for their beliefs. Later, groups such as the Anabaptists were persecuted by both Catholic and Protestant governments because they practiced adult baptism instead of infant baptism. These examples demonstrate the dangers that arise when governments enforce religious doctrine.

Even among Christians, differences in beliefs have sometimes resulted in conflict when one denomination has sought to impose its convictions on others. History records instances in which state-supported churches denied other Christians the right to worship freely, hold public office, or even own property. Such actions contradict Christ's teachings of love, compassion, and respect for individual conscience.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has long advocated for religious liberty for all people, regardless of their faith. Adventists believe that every individual should be free to worship according to the dictates of conscience without fear of government coercion or religious discrimination. This conviction is rooted in both Scripture and experience. Bible prophecy, particularly in the books of Daniel and Revelation, warns of the dangers that can arise when religious authority and civil power unite to compel religious practices.

The separation of church and state protects Christians of every denomination by ensuring that no single church can use government authority to enforce its beliefs. It allows Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Catholics, Pentecostals, Seventh-day Adventists, and many others to worship according to their understanding of Scripture. It also protects individuals who may hold different interpretations of biblical teachings or who choose to practice no religion at all.

Religious liberty benefits everyone. When the government remains neutral in matters of religion, churches are free to fulfill their spiritual mission without political interference, and citizens are free to seek God according to their own convictions. This environment encourages peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and meaningful dialogue rather than coercion and division.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe that defending the separation of church and state is an expression of Christian love and respect for the God-given freedom of conscience. It preserves the rights of all people to worship—or not worship—according to their sincerely held beliefs. Protecting this principle today helps ensure that future generations will continue to enjoy the freedom to follow Christ according to the guidance of Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Rivera

From: Daniel Miranda <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT - Separation of Church and State [Daniel Miranda]
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 2026 00:58:08 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Religious Liberty Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to send our comments. I am a Seventh-day Adventist Pastor who feels very strongly about this topic. As a Seventh-day Adventist, I believe that the separation of church and state has been a key element in the success of this American experiment of the Republic. Our Pilgrim Fathers came to this land seeking freedom to worship God according to their consciences, which they did not have in Europe. I do not oppose the idea of following universal moral values to improve the morality of the nation, but that is very different from the state favoring a specific faith over others. The state has only jurisdiction over the last six commandments, which pertain to our duties to our neighbors (see Romans 13).

While it is true that the phrase "separation of church and state" is not in the Constitution, nor is "religious freedom," the concept is rooted in the First Amendment of the Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Therefore, as a U.S. citizen and as a Christian, I respectfully oppose any attempt to bring the church and the state together.

Sincerely,

Daniel Miranda
Sanger, CA

Daniel Miranda

Pastor | Orosi-Sanger Bilingual SDA Churches

Sanger Office: [redacted]

Orosi: Office [redacted]

From: meekseeker <[redacted]>
To: "[redacted]" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – Building Bridges Between Church and State PG 44. – N. Madden
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 2026 01:04:14 -0400
Importance: Normal

To the Religious Liberty Commission,
As a Seventh-Day Adventist, I would like to thank the Administration for it's efforts to promote, maintain and extend the reach of genuine Religious Liberty through the findings in this report. As is alluded to in the report, faith and the federal government play a major role in appropriate collaborations for the betterment of society and it is essential to revive the understanding the Founding Fathers possessed in pursuit of the continuance of America's greatness. The singularity of her rise and achievements have been the envy of the world, but it is the singularity of America's founding principles that are most often overlooked.

It has been said that America is a Christian nation, but I would contend that America is truly a Protestant nation, as the right to dissent along with freedom of religion cannot be prioritized higher than they are in the constitution. This is remarkable, because the Christian nations of Europe historically possessed no such bold and expansive perspectives or liberties. And given this singularity, it is all the more reason to preserve and protect it in the way the Founding Fathers framed it.

The caveat to the benefits of building a bridge between church and state is that history records that the most grave abuses of religious liberty were not imposed by the secular powers upon the religious, but rather, the religious entities co-opting power to impose upon the divergently religious. The Roman persecutions, Spanish Inquisitions, The Marian Persecutions & The St. Bartholomew massacre are all examples where Christian/religious nations broadened the bridge between church and state to the detriment of genuine Religious Liberty. The tyranny of the anti-religious in government is a veritable threat, but over and over history has reminded us the threat also runs in the opposite direction.

My most sincere hope is that the Religious Liberty Commission would make formidable efforts to maintain protections that guard on BOTH fronts of vulnerability to Religious Liberty: The danger of anti-religious incursion of power in government against people of faith, as well as the incursion of pro-religious power in government against all others. History has revealed to us that we are no less vulnerable to the woes of the past where tradition exercises tyranny over personal truths, therefore we must spare no pains to avert that danger. This is especially critical in light of the fact that religious tyranny seems to precede the fall of many great nations of the past.

-Babylon fell the night they defiled the Israelite religious vessels.
-Medo-Persia fell shortly after a decree to exterminate all of Jewish faith.
-Greece dissolved in the years subsequent to Antiochus Epiphanes outlawing of the Jewish faith.
-Rome disintegrated subsequent to centuries of Christian persecution.
-The church of Rome lost it's statehood and it's head of state was exiled after years of Protestant persecution.

These are histories that would greatly benefit those who give them strongest consideration.

Sincerely,
N. Madden
Alberta, Canada

From: Dave Bostrom <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Commission's draft on Religious Liberty.
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 2026 01:36:10 -0400
Importance: Normal

Concerning your draft. My wife Sandy and I are patriots, love our country and our religious freedom that our constitution protects.

Our understanding of our Country's religious history is a journey of freedom. Our early Christian colonies were founded with their early church faith beliefs and ideals. That led to much division and sad tragedies. Little by little Roger Williams beliefs on separation of government from church, not having government forcing citizens against their will, won and was placed in our Constitution. We are all created equal. That is why we believe in so much of the early church history documented by Pillars of Freedom.org and their letter to you. We must not become a country ruled by a King or Pope. Give freedom to the churches. Not financial ties for government control.

As a Seventh-Day Adventist, pastoral family, who worship on the Seventh-day Sabbath, we just read Charlie Kirk's book (witten before his death) "When God Says Stop", He spoke how Individuals must choose to rest. They choose how they worship. That is what we love about our country. Our government makes laws for citizens focused on the Commandments 5-10. The government does not legislate God's commandments 1-4 between us and our personal worship of God. Do not favor one religious faith over another.

the Commission's draft has concerned us because government sending money to churches, schools and institutions open's the doors to the same
Corruption of authority and evils that led to the dark ages when the church became a state church. The church thrives most when government does not regulate or support financially the churches. Let them be free of government. We should not open the doors for churches financially supporting politics. Let Christian members have freedom to vote and support as they choose. Not a church.

Thank you your your deep concern to protect America's faith in God. Please keep money out of it.

Sincerely, Pastor, Dave and Sandy Bostrom. Director "Sabbath Delight Seminars"

From: Sienna Gippert <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT –Separation of Church and State – Sienna
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 2026 02:02:39 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear Members of the Religious Liberty Commission,

Thank you for inviting public comment.

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I deeply value religious liberty. I believe every person should be free to worship God according to conscience—or not to worship at all—without government coercion or favoritism.

Throughout history, whenever civil government has become closely aligned with religion, minority faiths have often suffered. America's constitutional protections have been a blessing because they have allowed people of many different beliefs to live together peacefully.

I respectfully encourage the Commission to preserve a clear distinction between the institutions of church and state. Government should protect the free exercise of religion without appearing to endorse or advance any particular faith. In my view, this approach best safeguards liberty of conscience for Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, Seventh-day Adventists, and all Americans alike.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Sent from Yahoo Mail for iPhone

From: Tim Cromwell <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT – PRESIDENTIAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT – TIM CROMWELL
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 2026 02:57:40 -0400
Importance: Normal

July 13, 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:

I am writing as a born again and committed Seventh-day Adventist Christian and a proud American. I am proud of our United States history as a nation that fosters religious liberty and allows the free expression of ideas and beliefs, even those I disagree with. It is exactly this allowance for pluralistic religious freedom of belief and expression that has made this nation great and, I believe, blessed by God Himself.

Both the founders of our nation and founders of my church fought hard to make sure this nation not only promised religious liberty, but provided it. Great examples of this are the founding fathers of America (Madison, Jefferson, Washington, Adams, and Roger Williams, to name a few), and in my church Alonzo T. Jones, a Seventh-day Adventist pioneer who in 1887 became editor of the American Sentinel, the official paper of the religious liberty department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the precursor to Liberty magazine, whose December 13, 1888 testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor on the topic of the "Breckinridge Bill" helped defeat that bill, which proposed to compel the observance of Sunday. During the course of his testimony he was challenged with the question, "You deny the right of the majority, in other words, to make a law in conformity with which the whole shall practice in society?" He responded, "I deny the right of any civil government to make any law respecting anything that pertains to man's relationship to his God, under the first four of the ten commandments. I wish right here to show further that this is not only the principle of the word of Jesus Christ, but also of the American Constitution." This has been the position of Seventh-day Adventists, a truly American church, throughout their existence. I encourage you to read the rest of his very insightful arguments which are retained in the UC Berkeley Law Library Catalog (https://lawcat.berkeley.edu/record/186407) and can also be read here: https://m.egwwritings.org/en/book/1171.21/toc .

The founding fathers have over and over stated the government should never be used to "give persecution [any] assistance" (see Geo. Washington's letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, 1790: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-06-02-0135), to assume "dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinion and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible" (see the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, drafted 1777, enacted 1786: https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title57/chapter1/), to act as judge "of Religious Truth . . . [or] employ Religion as an engine of Civil policy" (see James Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, 1785: https://constitutioncenter.org/museum/historic-document-library/detail/james-

madison-memorial-and-remonstrance-against-religious-assessments-1785), or to "make [any] law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (see the Constitution of the United States of America, 1778: https://uscode.house.gov/static/constitution.pdf). Why? Because "religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God" (see Thomas Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists, 1802: https://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html). Because they are "themselves but fallible and uninspired men" (see the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom, drafted 1777, enacted 1786: https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title57/chapter1/). Because “the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion" (see Article XI of the 1796 Treaty of Tripoli: https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1796t.asp). Because to impinge upon the "unalienable Rights" of its citizens to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness," which "endowed by their Creator" includes how one lives out their faith (see the Declaration of Independence, 1776: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript).

I have heard some of you say that the separation of church and state is not in the Constitution. However, the very words of the Constitution that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (see the Constitution of the United States of America, 1778: https://uscode.house.gov/static/constitution.pdf) carry this exact connotation and was signed by Gen. Washington and the deputies from the 12 states with that in there. I believe we should trust the founders knew what they were signing and that they know better than we do what they meant by their words. That is why the letter of Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptists in 1802 mentioning “a wall of separation between Church & State" was referenced by the Supreme Court when they ruled on this matter. That is why my Mennonite ancestors fled to these shores from religious persecution in Russia after they had previously fled from religious persecution to Russia.

I pray you will reconsider this matter and preserve the separation of Church and State in our great nation. I appeal to you in the name of "the Supreme Judge of the world" (see the Declaration of Independence, 1776: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript).

Sincerely,
Tim Cromwell
Shelton, Washington

From: Jessica Vierra <[redacted]>
To: "RLC (OASG)" <[redacted]>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] PUBLIC COMMENT RLC Report keep CHURCH and STATE SEPARATE
Date: Tue, 14 Jul 2026 04:38:45 -0400
Importance: Normal

Dear members of the commission,
I am a bible-believing Christian and part of a small business and nonprofit organization. We manufacture and sell herbal remedies and run health programs in various churches and communities. We are not a big business, we often run on thin margins, and we do a lot of volunteer work for our church, and God has always been faithful and taken care of us. Like Dr. Ben Carson, vice-chair of this commission, I am also a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and we have always firmly believed in separation of church and state.
I ask in earnest that you do not repeal the Johnson Amendment. Just because there are fraudulent nonprofits and corrupt ministers is no excuse to allow for more government involvement or to get churches politically involved. While we do believe this nation was founded on bible-believing christian principles- and almost all of the signers of the declaration were believers of a Christian God, we firmly believe in the founding father's vision that all people should have the freedom to practice their beliefs and religion in freedom of conscience. To worship freely, and to not let the state creep in and be mixed up in financial profit or repealing amendments that harness freedom of conscience, speech, and the practicing of religion. As a member of a church board, ministry leader, and health ministry co-director, I am asking you to uphold the Johnson Amendment, Do NOT repeal it.
The STATE/Government has always become a vehicle for force. I would encourage each of you to be enlightened by the book "The Law" by Frederic Bastiat. Anyone who holds the priveliage of a government office has the upmost duty to defend the rights of the people's liberty. To be vigilant of yourselves for the sake of freedom and to protect religious organizations at all cost, by drawing a clear line in the sand and staying outside of them. Yes the state constitutions had declaration of faith statements in 9 of the 13 colonies before we became the United States of America, but there was no use of force in those declaration of faith statements. Thankfully our founding fathers in their wisdom vehemently believed a person's faith should not be intruded upon by government and religious doctrine should not be written into governance. This is reflected in the declaration of independence and constitution. Their wisdom was timeless. Their vision providencial, their leadership just, and their foresight was brilliant. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, is a hill worth dying on. Yes indeed separation of church and state is implied in our first amendment that congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. Thank you for taking the time to consider my comment and I hope and pray this commission revises and amends their proposals.

P.S. For God's sake, we do NOT need 1 million bumper stickers saying "There is no such thing as separation of church and sake."

--
Jessica Vierra
"Let your food be your medicine and medicine be your food" - Hippocrates

* Unique Advocacy for Truth & Justice for Kandhamal

With Masters in English literature, Diploma in Journalism and LL. B from Delhi University, **Anto Akkara** has been a journalist for three decades with international media. The 57-year-old journalist has reported extensively from hotspots in South Asia on human rights, religious issues and social problems. He has to his credit several 'leader' articles for the *Times of India* and his wire reports have been carried even by *The Washington Post*.

Akkara reported extensively from the ground the 2004 tsunami devastation in South Asia, protracted ethnic war in Sri Lanka, oppression in Myanmar, birth of democracy and devastating earthquake of 2015 in Nepal, winning over a dozen national and international media awards.

David vs Goliath Fight for Truth & Justice for Kandhamal:
When the national media forgot the simmering anti-Christian violence in remote Kandhamal jungles of eastern Odisha state in 2008, Akkara stirred the nation's conscience with his investigative book: ***Kandhamal - a blot on Indian Secularism***.

(Christian targets across Kandhamal went up in flames following the murder of Hindu Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati on August 23, 2008. Weeks of unabated violence, triggered by the propaganda that the Hindu leader's murder was a Christian conspiracy, left nearly 100 Christians dead, 300 churches and 6,000 Christian houses plundered rendering 56,000 Christians homeless with the state mandarins remaining spectators.)

P. Chidambaram, the Home Minister of India had a personal audience with the author following the headlines the book made and visited Kandhamal soon after receiving the book. Chidambaram even told Indian Parliament in July 2009 that what happened in Kandhamal was '*a blot on the face of Orissa'* – quoting the title of the book.

The journalist's maiden book had been provoked by government officials' refusal to register criminal cases even in murders. In three weeks after the release of the book, Odisha government acknowledged five murders highlighted in it, paving way for Rs half a million ($ 6,800) compensation to each of the dependant families. Despite his goal being achieved on 'unacknowledged murders', Akkara continued to pursue Kandhamal with frequent trips to the remote region.

Hindu nationalist conspiracy: Soon after the Swami's murder, four Christians had been beaten up and dumped in police station by Hindu bigots, after inserting the Bible and a knife in their bags. It was World Hindu Council leader Praveen Togadia who announced the names of 'Swami's Christian killers' and not the police.

The police released them after 40 days and arrested seven 'innocent' Christians - six of them illiterates including a mentally challenged. After four years of trial, the second judge too who had questioned the prosecution was transferred in 2013 and court was shut down before the verdict.

Soon, Akkara called on Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde in New Delhi, requesting a federal inquiry into Kandhamal due to the bizarre situation: *Fast Track trial over, judge transferred, court shut down and innocents behind bars.*

With shocking revelations, the journalist brought out ***'Kandhamal craves for Justice***' on the 5th anniversary in 2013, exposing the travesty of justice: a single conviction in 29 murder trials completed while 'innocent' Christians languished behind bars on trumped up murder charge.

The BJP rode to power after the May 2014 election. Yet, Akkara continued his pursuit and forayed deep into remote jungles to meet the illiterate wives of the 'innocents'. The Hindu neighbours too vouched for their innocence. The scrutiny of dozens of court documents, dubious books and videos from *'India Foundation',* led by BJP stalwarts, confirmed the Hindu nationalist conspiracy.

DOJ-RLC Comment-020662

The journalist author came out with the masterpiece of his arduous research on Kandhamal '***Who Killed Swami Laxmanananda?*** in May 2016, silencing the ruling Hindu nationalists with stunning evidence.

'Kandhamal tale in new light', wrote '*The Telegraph'* English daily about the investigative book that read like a detective novel decoding the mystery behind the murder of the Hindu leader on a sacred Hindu festival night and why seven 'innocent' Christians languished in jail for the murder.

Why was the Swami killed?: "*The actual intention of the Europe, US, the Pope and Sonia Gandhi was to convert the entire region into the independent Christian land. God has sent me from Himalaya, and it was stalled. That is why their campaign was to drive away swami and create a Christian land. As long as I am alive I shall not let you do that*"- Swami Laxmanananda had boasted years before his murder. This claim was cited as proof in the documentary '*The Agony of Kandhamal*' - produced by the *India Foundation* that anchored the Kandhamal cover-up.

Since the Swami had named even the Pope and Sonia Gandhi as people who considered him a threat to the Christianization of Kandhamal, it was easy to spread the conspiracy theory that Christians had killed him. Hence, a contract killing was commissioned.

When the Christians in Kandhamal were brutalized after Swami's murder, the Hindu Nationalist leadership expected, the international Christian lobby led by the Pope would persuade Sonia Gandhi (of Italian Catholic origin) as chairperson of the ruling federal coalition to dismiss the Odisha government in which the BJP was a coalition partner at the time. That would pave way for the BJP to sweep the 2009 election – with the propaganda that Mrs. Gandhi was '*Papa ki Beti*' (Pope's daughter to Christianize India).

But the intelligence agencies got the wind of this outlandish conspiracy and cautioned the federal government against stepping on the Kandhamal landmine.

Cover up that exposed the conspiracy: When the grandiose scheme fell flat, top Hindu nationalists launched an elaborate cover up under the *'India Foundation',* producing ghost books and documentaries on Kandhamal. As if in a fairy tale, these dubious products reached Akkara from Ram Madhav, spokesperson of Hindu nationalist network and BJP general secretary!

The '*Harvest of Hate - Kandhamal in Crossfire*' by Michael Parker was published by the *India Foundation* in 2009. The book carried a '*Publisher's Note*' by *India Foundation* director Nirmala Sitharaman (presently Finance Minister of India) who described Michael Parker as *'born in India'* while the profile at the end of the book declared that Parker was '*born in the US'*!

"In August 2009, this report was presented to the US State Department by Ram Madhav, a National Executive of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha," confirmed Brannon Parker who later published the same book with minor modifications as '*ORISSA in the CROSSFIRE - Kandhamal Burning*'.

Since the *'India Foundation'* had listed no phone number, the intrepid journalist reached the address printed in *'Harvest of Hate'*: 343, Chandanwadi Apartment, Sector 10, Dwarka, New Delhi 110 045. This venture gave him the shock of his life. The flat was owned by *Ajit Kumar Doval, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's top strategist as the National Security Advisor*!

(In September 2019, Akkara met Brannon Parker at Seattle with the help of US national William Rogers who had traced Brannon. In this meeting, Brannon confirmed that he was 'fooled' into the Kandhamal cover-up book by Ram Madhav and wrote even 'lies' about the Christians.)

Caught red-handed in the Kandhamal cover-up, *India Foundation* has recast itself to exorcise the Kandhamal ghost from haunting it by shunning the word 'Kandhamal' itself on its website.

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The stunning findings of ***'Who Killed Swami Laxmanananda?'*** **-** released in major cities with eminent jurists, writers, and activists – made the media highlight the travesty of justice with headlines:

- *Book questions conviction of Christians in Kandhamal violence*
- *New Book Reignites Questions Over Alleged Cover-Up of Kandhamal Killings*
- *Christian community falsely framed in Saraswati killing: Book*
- *Book On Kandhamal 'A Wake-Up Call For The Nation'*
- *Odia media rewrites Kandhamal script*
- *Kerala CM demands fresh probe into death of Swami Laxmanananda*

This relentless campaign has baffled many as the vociferous Hindu nationalist clan led by the ruling BJP has not uttered a word against Akkara nor challenged the charges raised by the fearless journalist repeatedly naming even top BJP government officials as Kandhamal 'conspirators.

Such has been the impact of the book that after reading the book, a retired judge of Odisha High Court *(FYI only - Justice A S Naidu whose report of the Kandhamal Inquiry Commission not yet made public)* called the author for a meeting and said: *"I have gone through your book. Congratulations."*

Online signature campaign for Kandhamal's 7 Innocents: Prior to the release of the investigative book, the journalist author discretely brought the illiterate wives of the seven '*innocents'* on March 3, 2016 to New Delhi to launch the *online signature campaign* for the release of their husbands in the presence of a host of national celebrities.

(The dignitaries including opposition political leaders were stunned when the crew of half a dozen TV channels left on 'urgent call' minutes before the launch of the campaign, indicating that powerful forces were trying to black out the campaign. The crusader had several censorship experiences including his email account getting disrupted in critical moments ahead of his programs.)

The bold campaign, bordering on 'contempt of court' for challenging the judicial system, generates four instant emails from each online signature to *the Chief Justice of India, the President of India, the Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission and the Chief Justice of Odisha High Court*.

In follow up, Akkara released the stunning documentary *'INNOCENTS IMPRISONED'* on the 10th anniversary of Kandhamal on 23 August 2018. Visual presentation of Kandhamal's travesty of justice, the documentary calls for endorsing the online petition, the documentary has been dubbed into key *Odia, Hindi* and *Malayalam* languages.

The 17-minute documentary inspired *THE WIRE* (critical news portal) interview - *10 Years of Kandhamal Riots: "7 Innocents Have Been Convicted," Says Anto Akkara.* The bare-all interview exposed why the 'innocents' including a mentally challenged continued to languish in jail for a crime they never committed.

Bail for the 'Innocents': After the Odisha High Court rejected bail to them a second time on December 4, 2018 – contrary to norms laid down by the Supreme Court, Christian legal networks moved the federal Supreme Court challenging the denial of bail.

When the Supreme Court granted bail to Gornath Chalanseth, Akkara rushed to Kandhamal to receive the first 'innocent' coming out in May 21. Two months later, Bijay Kumar Sanseth too was granted bail by the Supreme Court.

However, the bail applications of the remaining five - Bhaskar Sunamajhi, Buddhadeb Nayak, Durjo Sunamajhi, Munda Badamajhi and Sanathan Badamajhi - got adjourned repeatedly in the Supreme Court. The routine hearing on the bail applications were adjourned repeatedly - not by judges but by the office of the Registrar of the Supreme Court!

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Akkara challenged this judicial farce in a November 21 Facebook post: *"When will the Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court fix the 'COMPUTER' bug in the Registrar's Office that has been adjourning repeatedly the bail pleas of Kandhamal's remaining five INNOCENTS?"* (Coincidence or not, the bail order for the remaining five 'Innocents' from the Supreme Court came five days later on November 26 - the next '*computer generated*' date of hearing.)

Campaign for 'Justice for 7 Innocents of Kandhamal': Following the bail for the five, Akkara cut short a reporting trip to Europe and rushed to Kandhamal to receive the *'Innocents coming out of jail', parade them before the media*, and revise the campaign to 'Justice for 7 Innocents of Kandhamal'.

Kandhamal Faith Saga: The journalist author, who has also chronicled the incredible witness of Kandhamal Christians with '***Shining Faith in Kandhamal***' in 2009 and followed it up with '***Early Christians of 21st Century***' that was released by Cardinal Fernando Filoni, president of Vatican's Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples at Indian bishops' assembly in 2013.

The book highlights how homeless Christians turned their 'losses into gains' amid saffron foot-soldiers blackmailing thousands of Christians to forsake faith to return to their villages. They chose to languish in dingy slums than to turn their back to Christ and gave sterling testimony as true followers of Christ who gladly carried the cross without running away from it (Mat 16:24).

History repeats itself. As in the *'Early Christians'* era, hardly any Christian gave up their faith while hundreds of Hindus including those who tormented the Christians have been flocking to churches to profess the faith they tried to banish from Kandhamal. The poor but Christians have defeated and silenced the mighty Hindu nationalists.

Akkara is a witness to their incredible witness. His fractured leg was healed miraculously on the New Year Day of 2012 at the spot where the first martyr of Kandhamal – a paralyzed youth Rasanand Pradhan - had been torched alive. With the fracture, Akkara believes God made him sit to work with full concentration on ***'Early Christians of 21st Century'*** when he was handicapped. When he went to Kandhamal eight months later to verify some crucial facts ignoring doctor's caution, he had a biblical healing at the martyrdom spot of the paralyzed youth.

A missionary friend asked Akkara to include this testimony in the book "*since you are a witness to their faith."* With the doctor too confirming his miraculous healing, Cardinal Oswald Gracias who has written the Foreword promptly approved insertion of this *'author's testimony'* titled: *'Woe to me unless I preach the Good News"*. That is what Akkara has done all these years. The rock-like faith of even illiterate Christians inspired him to accompany them to document their incredible testimony.

The political outcome of this unique pilgrimage is the fulfilment of the Gospel assurance of Luke 12:2: *"Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known."*

For holding on to their faith amid diabolic cruelty, rampant impunity and state apathy, Kandhamal Christians deserve the title '*Early Christians of 21st Century*':
Cardinal Filoni releases book on Kandhamal stories
Christians Shamefully Persecuted in India
They Looked Into the Face of Evil but Found the Courage of Their Faith
Persecuted Indian Christians Evangelize…by Forgiving
In February 2020, Akkara brought the Seven Innocents on bail to Bangalore at great risk. Presenting the seven Pentecostal illiterates before the assembly of nearly 200 Catholic bishops in India, Akkara reminded them about the silence of the Christian community to the 'innocents' due to fear of the ruling BJP.

"Faith must lead to Action," urged Akkara, calling for solidarity in the fight for justice for the 'Innocents' of Kandhamal. END [redacted]

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