The Separation of Church and State: Friend or Foe of Faith?

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Originally an examination of those who prophecy the coming marginalization of Christianity in the United States, this research paper took on a life of its own as I found myself more and more interested in why Christianity was so successful in the United States yet less successful in Europe. Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America had a particular impact on my research. He boldly observed that perhaps it was the close association of religion and government that made Christianity unpopular among the French. Paradoxically, in Toqueville's thinking, banning religion from government—or government from religion—was good for religion. This notion hit home for me.

Growing up in a mainstream United Methodist Church, I never understood why it would be beneficial for my public school to have the Ten Commandments posted in its classrooms. Early on, I learned that my faith was different from that of other Christians and quite frankly, trusted no one but myself to administer that faith correctly. As a boy, I feared the idea of Christianity being paired with my public schools for the simple reason that I did not know whose brand of faith would be administered. For people like me, Tocqueville's observation is spot on: Should the government have had an administrative hand in my faith, I would have grown up feeling less confident about Christianity and organized religion in general.

Yet, many have had dissimilar experiences and the separation of church and state is certainly not supported by everyone. Conservatives today deride it as ever encroaching secularism in disguise. Others may see it as a systemic advantage to Christianity under the cover of religious liberty. Steven M. Feldman argues, "The separation of church and state is far more (or far less) than a principle protecting democracy and religious liberty.

Contrary to the dominant story, the separation of church and state stands, to a great extent, as a political and religious development that manifest and reinforces Christian domination in American society."[1] No, not all will agree with me, but my life and the lives of many others have shown that Tocqueville's observation has merit. The separation of church and state, while frequently vilified, does play a positive role in American religion historically and contemporarily.

While I am certainly not the first to suggest such a claim, I have yet to find someone who examines such a statement more fully.[2] While this claim may seem to be self-evident, it is not. The logic seems backwards: "Wouldn't a government hand in religion help, not hurt, Christianity?" I decided to write this paper in order to better understand if and why religion is strengthened by the separation of church and state. To me, the church-state separation is in many ways the bedrock of American Christianity. To ignore the relationship between separation and the success of religion would be to deny the most obvious of observations: that there is one.

"Mother of God, pray for us," Patrick J. Buchanan writes in his book, *The Death of the West*. "We no longer have a republic," he warns, "And Christianity, driven out of the public square is losing its hold… America remains the most 'Christianized' nation of the West, but for millions it is not the demanding and fighting faith of old." Buchanan is not the only one with this fear. Many like him are currently attempting to steer America

[1] Feldman, a Jew, lays out in details not only the history of the doctrine of the separation of church and state and claims that it belongs to the Christian tradition and therefore strengthens Christianity, not religious pluralism. Steven M. Feldman, *Please Don't Wish Me a Merry Christmas*," (New York: New York university, 1997), 5.

[2] As I have mentioned, Alexis de Tocqueville makes this claim in Alexis de Tocqueville, trans. Gerald E. Bevan, *Democracy in America* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 340; an example of contemporary scholarship stating that the separation of church and state is good for religion is Kyle A. Pasewark and Garrett E. Paul, *The Emphatic Christian Center*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 191

away from its supposedly secular ways. To those who fear the marginalization of Christianity in America, secular forces are the antithesis of the United States' historically Christian identity. For these people and to Buchanan, Christianity is the bedrock of the nation.

To demonstrate his point, Buchanan makes statistical parallels between the secularization of Europe and the contemporary culture of the United States. Among his conclusions is that "secularists" are attempting to remove religion—specifically Christianity—from American public life via the separation of church and state. He says that like Europe, America is on its way to a "de-Christianized" society. Also like Europe, this nation will become a country of low birthrates, abortions, and homosexual values.[3] For Buchanan and those who agree with him, the attempt to ban Christ and Judeo-Christian symbols from schools and courthouses is one step towards an atheistic society. These are the fears of the anti-secularist right.

Buchanan's premise is that Christianity truly *is* on the decline in the United States. Just as Europe lost its religion, so will America, according to Buchanan. One of the ways to fix the "problem," his thinking goes, is to move the nation away from a "strict" separation of church and state. If the government were less worried about cleansing itself of Christianity, then more people would embrace the faith. If the American government was less concerned about separation and more worried about the free exercise of religion, perhaps organized religion would not be facing marginalization in the United States, or so the thinking goes.

But does religion actually face a marginalization? Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore ask, "How seriously can we take such warnings if the religious right can

[3] Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West* (New York: St. Martin's, 2002), 192.

claim anywhere near the constituency that its literature boasts, about a quarter of the American voting population—24 million Protestant evangelicals and a large proportion of America's 58 million Catholics? Most groups would relish marginalization of that sort."[4] Statistics alone suggest that Christianity is far from the suffering faith that some cast it as. The rationale behind some conservative Christian commentators' worry of marginalization is not the subject of this paper, however, it must be derived from something other than a lessening of ranks. The question that follows—the relevant question for this study—is, should religiously faithful Americans worry about, or perhaps oppose, the separation of church and state?

In order to address such a question, the setting of American religion must be contrasted with Europe's religious history. History, fortunately, offers numerous cases of failed governments along with examples of faithfully satisfied—and dissatisfied—populations. History offers examples of faithful nations and atheistic societies. The United States—a predominantly Christian society—must be understood within its historical context.

One will see that Buchanan is right to contrast Europe with the United States: the two continents, although part of a greater "Western" culture, have vastly different religious histories. While Europe's history extends further than many Americans can fathom, the United States' history spans a short enough time period that it still encompasses one single academic subject. Those who warn that the United States will surely follow Europe on a path to secularization fail to recognize the key differences dividing the "West." Religion, ethnicity, politics and governing styles mark some of the obvious distinctions, but it is how states have addressed the role of religion and

[4] Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1996, 18.

government that has the most to do with the government's role in the success or failure of religion.

Many who are concerned about a decline in faith are also concerned about the removal of God from public life. These concerns are representative of a fear of losing faith, and an American value for Christianity. The fact that responses to such concerns, including this one, are couched in the language of religion display the overall value of religion in American life. Few choose to argue, at least publicly, that religion is not or should not be valuable to the United States. To the contrary, most will choose to argue, as I do, that religion is something good to the United States.

The "Separation of Church and State" has long been a debated legal principle in America. While some worry that Christianity will fall out of favor if the government remains intent on being uninvolved in religion, others worry about the imposition of religious values on an irreligious minority. When the people who worry about a decline in belief search for ways to promote and strengthen the Christian faith, or pinpoint areas that Christianity is being attacked, the government is often suggested as a point where the faith is being publicly challenged. This argument assumes that the separation of church and state is a hindrance on belief. To the contrary, I argue in this thesis that ***the separation of church and state is a reason for the continued success of religious belief in the United States***. It is also the recipe for preventing the very secularism that Buchanan is concerned with.

This thesis will show that America has differentiated itself from Europe and warded off secularization in part because it has insisted upon voluntary religion. While European countries associated the church with government, the United States has had a

history of (relative) religious pluralism and toleration, and (relative) government detachment from religion. It will be seen that this association of the church with the state created resentment to the church. Specifically, France's history represents a counterexample to the United States. While the U.S. has witnessed increased religious participation since it's founding, France saw a bloody revolution turn against the monarchy associated Catholic Church. Present-day France, the result of the French Revolution, I argue, is a country that has been historically tainted by the anti-Church, anti-God sentiment of those violent years. This claim, that European church-state religion had something to do with the decline of religion throughout Europe is not mine originally. However, most people mention so in passing, without caring to further examine such a claim. I hope to examine this argument further by focusing on France's history of church-state relations and the success of Christianity in America.

To demonstrate my overall claim that the separation of church and state is good for belief, I have separated my argument into three relevant areas. First, it is important to address the current state of belief in the world. Where is Christianity strong, weak, growing, and shrinking? Where is religion thriving, or failing? The status of religion and faith in the United States and France today, respectively, is representative of the outcome of differing governmental approaches to religion. Second, the history of France, with an emphasis on the French Revolution sheds light on the relation between government and religion. In this literally revolutionary human experiment, an entire people attempted to rid itself of Christianity. Why? This paper will address the history of such a change and its parallels—or lack of—to America. Finally, the contemporary argument against the separation of church and state in America comes out of a peculiar and counterintuitive

history. Once, American evangelicals hailed the separation of church and state. Together, all of these areas will demonstrate that the separation of church and state should be thanked for its role in preserving American faith.

"Secularization" and Determining the Current Status of Belief in France and the United States

In order to address the broader topic of the separation of church and state the status of belief in the United States and France must first be explored. This will establish the extent of the difference in these two nations' religious adherents. Only then can the issue of whether or not the separation of church and state is good for belief be addressed.

Whether or not "secularization" occurs in a given society is by nature a subjective observation. However, it is necessary to examine the role between governing philosophy and the extent of secularization for a serious approach to this study. A difficult term to define in and of itself, secularization, for this research paper, will be defined as the movement away from religion as demonstrated by participation in and belief of religion. Yet some academics doubt whether the term is useful at all. Michael Burleigh notes that many scholars cannot agree to the time, place and reason for "secularization" in many instances.[1] The vague nature of secularization does not necessarily mean that it is not occurring: "It is easier to be sure that there was a Renaissance in the fifteenth century than to explain what you mean when you say that there was a Renaissance in the fifteenth

[1] Michael Burleigh, Earthly Powers (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 476, n. 106.

century."[2] Similarly, secularization can be understood something that happened, or as something that is happening.

Thus, secularization, as forewarned of in the manner of Mr. Buchanan, is not a new or stoic concept. For decades—centuries—a coming secularization has been predicted, and at least in the traditionally defined sense, it has not occurred in the United States. Michael Burleigh describes this history:

> Many nineteenth-century thinkers believed that society was progressing from backward epochs when religion was pervasive to future times when religion would be regarded as an outmoded illusion, perhaps to be superseded by a 'rational' creed focused on humanity… A number of nineteenth-century writers argued that religion was retreating from areas of existence where it had once been important… The advanced parts of the world were being 'disenchanted' by processes that made Christianity both implausible and irrelevant… But [this kind of ethical, scientific and theological challenge to religion was not] as important as the vaster impersonal developments which 'disenchanted' the world, deracinated traditional communities, eradicated or gave rise to social classes, transformed Churches and sects into denominations, and, the universal fact of mortality apart, diminished the incidence of crises to which religion alone had the most compelling answers.[3]

Yet Burleigh notes something strange about the European secularization: "Secularisation [sic] was not a straight descent from a putative peak of faith… Secularisation [sic] was a congeries of intellectual and social trends, punctuated (and punctured) by resurgences of Christian fervour, or awareness that Christianity performed essential moral, political, charitable and social functions that it would be foolhardy to abandon."[4]

If secularization in Europe was such a vague and imprecise event, how could it be recognizable in the United States? Attitudes towards religion remain predominantly positive and many people still strongly believe in a God. Church attendance has not

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[2] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 2-3.
[3] Burleigh, 252-4.
[4] Burleigh, 253.

changed significantly. Yet the concern remains in place that America will follow Europe in losing its Christianity. Kenneth D. Wald describes this concern as "naïve." He calls this concern the "modernization" approach to secularization: "According to modernization theory, the forces of modernity shatter…cultures." Religious cultures change significantly as education spreads, communication is strengthened and factory production becomes more efficient. In a sense, the new enlightened culture replaces the old religious one, according to the theory of secularization. Wald says, "people come to define their personal identity and political interests not in terms of religion but as a function of their standing in the marketplace—as owners, workers, proprietors of small businesses, and so forth." As cultures progressed, according to the modernization approach to secularization, society would abandon religion.

Secularization theories rose to prominence among political observers—especially in the 1960's and 70's. Wald notes, "Most political observers never expected to find…an advanced industrial society in which religion excercised a tenacious hold on the public mind and strongly influenced the conduct of political life." Yet today, in the United States, religion has survived. By all estimates a modernized nation, the United States is still a nation of believers.[5] But how is this judgment, that the United States is still religious, made?

Determining the extent of "religiousness" is a vague and imprecise task. Whether a given society believes in the existence of a deity, and to what extent, is not difficult to observe. Despite seeming simplistic, it is incredibly difficult to measure the religiousness of a people. It may be easy to discern the atheist who proclaims, "God is dead," from the Christian who is trying to convert the masses. However, it is impossible to quantify the

[5] Kenneth D. Wald, Religion and Politics in the United States, 2nd ed. (Washington: CQ Press, 1992), 4-5.

state of belief and religion in a given culture. For this reason, it is difficult to accurately compare and contrast the "religiousness" of different cultures or counties.

While overt atheism and evangelism are easily recognizable, there are people who believe, but do not act upon their belief. There are non-believers who participate in civil religion. There are also non-believers that identify themselves as non-believers, yet choose to have religious funerals and weddings.

To attempt to define and describe the level of belief in a country, society or culture requires the placement of numbers and statistics with an idea—religion—that almost always has nothing to do with hard numbers and statistics. Yet belief ("I believe in God") is not the same as religious participation ("I attend church weekly"). An incredibly pious protestant Christian may rarely attend church while others who participate in religion may not have a strong belief in what they are participating in. Does the man sleeping in the back pew count as a Christian? The Jews who go to temple only on Yom Kippur are certainly Jewish, but are they "religious"?

Religious participation is a tricky quality to measure. Is religious participation qualified as once in a lifetime events like funerals and baptisms? Is it the participation in annual events that a person celebrates, such as Christmas and Easter? Or is religious participation the frequency with which one attends religious events? Further complicating matters is the question of denomination, or adherence to a particular religious worldview. Is belief declining if people are embracing other religions? Multiple religions? While one culture may have many who adhere to Christianity specifically, another country may have very little formal religious acknowledgement, but a large amount of people who believe in the existence of a deity.

The problems stem as much from defining religion and belief as they stem from the survey methods used in measuring belief. Is "religion" limited to major and formal religions: Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.? Or can religion be sports, or Star Trek? "Religion" itself is an elusive term. Determining the status of religion is clearly difficult. Patrick Buchanan's concern that Christianity is "losing its hold" is an inherently vague statement; in what way is it losing its hold?

No matter how difficult it is to precisely define a successful religion, being able to measure the religiousness of a people is incredibly important to academic endeavors addressing faith and culture and for my case, governance and religion. It is necessary to know how many Christians there are in the United States if one wants to argue that the separation of church and state is hurting religion. Dissimilarly, one needs to know how many people in France are atheists to make an argument that close ties between church and state make citizens resentful of their faith.

Understanding what makes religion flourish might depend on the way government addresses religion. Does the state sponsorship of religion help religion in general or one religion in particular? Or is the opposite true? In order to analyze the effect government might have on religion and belief, it is important to find an acceptable way to measure belief. In order to discuss any sort of "decline" in religion, there must be a way to spot a decline. Some, like Grace Davie, have argued that the religious declines noted across the world are not declines at all. Instead, different cultures and regions merely practice religion differently.

> If you were to compare Britain, Europe and America, it isn't the case that all Americans are religious and no Europeans are. Europeans are *differently* religious

> from Americans. And because European forms of religion don't look like their American equivalents, Americans very often don't see them.[6]

Davies notes that even in commonly labeled "atheistic" nations, religious funerals and baptisms are the norm. Not only do people participate in these sorts of once-in-a-lifetime religious events, they prefer them over secular alternatives, says Davies. To her, Europeans are still religious, however different their brand of religion might be. Garrett Paul and Kyle Pasewark also note the value judgment inherent in any attempt to define, "religious:"

> True, religion shows more vitality in the United States if that vitality is measured by worship attendance and other forms of participation. Yet the established and semi-established churches in Germany and the Netherlands, for example, have a public presence that American religious institutions might well envy, despite low attendance (by American standards). At the same time, European institutions seem to be less adept in dealing with plurality.[7]

However, for the reasons presented below, I have chosen a different measure of religiousness in this study. I agree with those, like Davies, who note the different ways of understanding the term "religious." In one society, religious participation, however defined, may be very important in creating a religious identity, yet in others, participation could not be less important. Religion can and should be studied on the level of outward and inward belief, obvious and subtle participation, and regular and irregular activity. These are all aspects of religion.

However, many Americans, I suggest, do not value being "differently religious" in the manner Davies describes European religion. Americans, including those who preach an almost eschatological message about the perils of secular society, are

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[6] Grace Davie, "Belief Without Belonging: Just How Secular Is Europe?" *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, December 5, 2005, 3.
[7] Kyle A. Pasewark and Garrett E. Paul, *The Emphatic Christian Center* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 191 n. 116.

concerned about distinct measures of religion, which I define to be mainly, 1) professed belief in God, and 2) regular attendance of religious services. These two variables clearly do not exhaust the available statistics available on religion across the world. The *World Values Survey* has data on everything from previously adhered to religious denominations to the perceived participation of compatriots in activities such as casual sex.[8] Anything at all that contributes to the picture of religiousness is included in the *World Values Survey*. Despite the variety of data available regarding religion across the world, for the sake of brevity as well as clarity, I believe the most pertinent determinants of American valued religion are the ones listed above. Those concerned about de-Christianization are not concerned about fewer baptisms or Buddhists. They are concerned about the amount of Americans who believe in a deity, a God, and the success of churches.

These two variables, "belief in God" and "regular attendance of religious services," represent the core of American values of religion. In the United States, just as Christmas is playing an increasingly secular role today, the "religious" aspects of European culture like baptisms and funerals are to many Americans, equally secular. In order to demonstrate more deliberate and purposeful religion, the self-conscious recognition of belief and the participation in a civil religion are necessary markers of religiosity. Not only do these two variables demonstrate the statistics Americans value in their religion, they represent the division between French and American religion.

These two nations have different religious demographics, with French rates of religious participation and belief in the existence of a deity much lower than the United States. France, when compared to the United States, has fewer people who regularly attend religious services and who believe in God. The contemporary religious portrait of

[8] *World Values Survey*, http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org.

France is exemplified by the constant debates over seemingly small religiously political issues, at least from an American perspective. In 2005, when Pope John Paul II died, the French government decided to lower flags to half-staff, sparking concerns from critics. In a secular state like France, secularists were concerned that to honor the pope in such a way violated that 1905 law that demanded a secular government. Not only did the lowering of the flags raise objections, so did President Jacques Chirac's mere attendance at the pope's funeral.[9] Going further than American law preventing the establishment of religion, France has also banned all conspicuous religious symbols at public schools, prohibiting everything from Muslim scarves to chocolate candies that happen to be shaped like a cross.[10] Recent laws like these are aimed at combating France's issues with Islam, but their underlying message is secularism through and through.

Statistics from the *World Values Survey* confirm that France is in fact more secular than most Western countries. While 12.3% of those surveyed in the *World Values Survey* state that they attend a religious service at least once a month, more than 60% state that they "never" attend such services. There has not been a significant change in these numbers since the 1980's, when the *World Values Survey* began collecting data on France.[11] Although few of the French attend religious services, 61.4% of the surveyed

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[9] Christine Ollivier, "French government criticized by secular politicians for putting flags at half staff for pope," *Associated Press Worldstream*, April 4, 2005.

[10] William J. Kole, "As holidays approach, French find new ban on religious symbols cute boths ways," *Associated Press Worldstream*, December 13, 2004.

[11] These statistics are from the 1999 survey of France, the most recent data available for the country. Since 1981, the amount attending services more than once a month has increased approximately 4.2%, the amount never attending a service has increased only 1.6%, however, the statistics from the 1990 survey of France show much lower numbers of "never" respondents (about an 8% difference), yet approximately the same number of respondents claim to attend church at least once a month as in 1999. All things taken into consideration, despite any possible trends, I find it most important to simply note that the relatively constant responses to the question of religious attendance. *World Values Survey*, "How often do you attend religious services?" http://www.jdsurvey.net/bdasepjds/QuestionCrosstab.jsp.

population still professes belief in God, while 38.6% do not.[12] Assuming that nearly everyone who attends religious services believes in God, there are quite a few people living in France who believe in God yet do not attend a religious service frequently. The United States helps put these demographics in perspective. In the United States, 61.1% of *World Values Survey* respondents say that they attend a religious service at least once a month, with 16.8% saying they attend more than once a week. Only 14.4% of Americans say that they never attend religious services.

To be clear, these statistics do not in fact mean that 61.1% of Americans actually attend a religious service once a month. Instead, they mean that 61.1% of Americans *claim* to attend a religious service at least once a month. These statistics, despite their realistic improbability, demonstrate something about the American desire to be active and participating in religion. These statistics show that many Americans want others to view them in a religious manner, or that they at least desire to view them selves in such a manner. Either way, to Americans, participation in a civic religious organization is important—much more important than to the French. They want to be participants in the churches, synagogues and mosques, even if they in all actuality are not. Americans are also much more likely than their French counterparts to believe in God. 95.9% of American survey respondents answer 'Yes" when asked if they believe in a god, while only 4% say no. These variables, together, show that the United States, on a whole, is more religious, and less secular than France. More people in America believe in God, and more Americans attend religious services.

These statistics are reliable and valid for the study of contemporary religion. As for the religion of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, there is less reliable data. Instead of

[12] *World Values Survey*, "Beliefs-God," http://www.jdsurvey.net/bdasepjds/QuestionCrosstab.jsp.

surveys, which do not exist for these times, other various statistics are all there is to rely upon. Some have inferred, for example, that a rise in out of wedlock births in 18th century France connotes an already secular society, however there are great assumptions in such a statement regarding religion, sex, marriage and belief.[13] A rise in out-of-wedlock births might mean nothing more then a rise in out of wedlock births. It may not have anything to do with religion or belief—or it could completely have to do with religion and belief. The problem is that historical data, such as a rise in out of wedlock births, is often all that is available to determine the religiosity of peoples in the past. If religious scholars today have difficulty determining how to measure and define the reach of religion in contemporary cultures, one can imagine how difficult it is to find consensus regarding the religiosity of say, 18th century France. Behind this façade of a secular France and a believing America lies a history rich with governmental and philosophical conflict and debate. While a contemporary measure of belief can be found through the science of polling and social science research, the events and history of the United States and France are the key components in an understanding of why religion is the way it is today. It is through this history that the current status of belief can be best understood.

In sum, France is a much less Christian nation than the United States. Fewer French than American citizens confess their faith and far fewer Frenchmen are participatory in their faith. Since the remarkable difference between the two nations has been shown, the reason for the difference must be explored. In order to do this, France and its religious history must be more directly addressed.

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[13] Davies, 3.

The French Revolution, Alexis de Tocqueville and the French Resentment Toward the Church

The French Revolution, frequently alluded to as the single most significant event in western history, took place from 1788-1789 in France. The Revolution, largely the result of class strife within France, was notable because the revolutionaries attempted to completely reconstruct society and erase the France of old. Of particular concern for the revolutionaries was the hierarchical structure that existed in France before the revolution. The revolutionaries, largely members of the lower and middle classes, targeted the upper estates as the source of their problems. The Revolution was strongly opposed to privilege and aimed to rid France of the feudal dues and tithes that were so burdensome to the commoner.[1] A target of the Revolution, the Clergy were among the privileged in France and as will be shown in this section, it was in many ways allied with the government. It was this relationship that ultimately led to the attempts to dismantle the Church and ultimately the desertion of the Christian religion by many French citizens.[2] Alexis de Tocqueville, a 19th century French thinker would later suggest that it was precisely this aspect of France's societal structure—the close relationship between church and state—that hurt Christianity so badly within France.

The Church's high social status prior to the French Revolution was solidified by its material wealth. With approximately one-fourth of Paris's property, the Church was nearly ubiquitous in influence and daily affairs. The public paid for this mass of property

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[1] Alan Forrest, *The French Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 37.

[2] The French Revolution is an immensely important historical event. Countless volumes of work have been devoted to it. These few sentences, of course, do not do justice to what happened during the Revolution. For a full history of the French Revolution I suggest William Doyle, *Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

in full through various forms of taxation. The Church, the nobility and the monarchy together took one-quarter to one-third of peasant produce "through taxes, seigneurial dues, and the tithe."[3] This mode of taxation, coupled with the other socially upper estates demonstrates the high social position the Church held.

These material possessions put the Church near the top of the French hierarchy, but it was the monarchy that kept it there. The King of France was officially the head of the Roman Catholic Church in France, the Gallican Church.[4] Meanwhile, the Clergy enjoyed tax privileges (including the benefit of being able to tax themselves), owned massive plots of land, and were the benefactors of the much-hated tithes.[5]

In 1765 the French clergy, who had an undefined but connected relationship to the state, seriously irritated the monarchy by denouncing the "temporal powers"—the government.[6] This denunciation led to a small but vehement debate over if the Church could dissent with the government and to what extent the two were related. The monarchy, thoroughly irritated, exacted its influence upon the clergy, seeking to quell the dissent. Was the church so related to the monarchy that dissent was not allowed? The insurrection grew into a larger legal debate within the government, yet wholly disappeared within two years. While the event took place and then faded into history, the irritation caused by the dissent of the clergy demonstrates how unusual and unacceptable an independent Church was before the revolution of 1789 took hold.

Alan Forrest in his study of the French Revolution concludes that, "As an institution, the Church had allowed itself to become identified with the monarchy, to the

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[3] Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution: 1789-1799* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7-13.
[4] Ibid., 18.
[5] Forrest, 88.
[6] T.C.W. Blanning, *The Rise and Fall of the French Revolution*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 29.

extent that some of the more anti-clerical of the *philosophes* saw their fate as being inextricably linked." Not only was the link of the Church and Monarchy present in 18th century France, it was the fuel for the revolutionaries.

Many have written about the resentment the common Frenchmen held towards the Church. Owen Chadwick writes,

> Early in the eighteenth century, a Frenchman wanted to strangle the last king with the guts of the last priest; that is, he regarded throne and alter as the two pillars of the prevailing order of society that he wanted to overthrow.[7]

When the revolution came, the Papacy was just as resentful of the common Frenchmen, as Alan Forrest describes: "The Papcy made no secret of its dislike for the [Revolution] in France, or of the importance which it attached to its alliance with the monarchies of Catholic Europe."[8] Many Clergy refused to plead loyalty to the Revolution, choosing exile, emigration and death instead. This created even more resentment from the Clergy to the Revolution and from the common Frenchmen to the Church. The Revolution, as a result, turned into an almost entirely secular force.[9]

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Alexis de Tocqueville, a Frenchmen, set sail for the United States on April 2, 1831 only thirty-two years after the French Revolution officially ended. Americans now know the famous work that resulted from his trip to the new nation, *Democracy in America*, as a classic. The two-volume book overtly represented a picture of republican America, however, Tocqueville's subversive motive was to portray a political argument for how republicanism could and should exist within France. The end of Tocqueville's life was spent immersed in direct research on the French Revolution. No longer masking

[7] Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century*, 107.
[8] Forrest, 37.
[9] Ibid., 88-90.

his views on the subject and its mark upon France's modern day affairs, he spent years exhausting the materials available in order to create a thorough political work on the Revolution.

The result of his work was *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*. The book addresses, among other issues the centralization of power within the monarchy and the relationship of the Catholic Church to the state. In it, Tocqueville also emphasizes the French resentment toward the Church that preceded the Revolution. One chapter, titled "How vehement and widespread anti-religious feeling had become in eighteenth-century France and its influence on the nature of the Revolution," describes the Church's complicity in the actions of the "secular authority"—the monarchy.

> …the Church was, if not the most oppressive, the chief of all the powers in the land, and though neither her vocation nor her nature called for this, co-operated with the secular authority, often condoning vices in it that in other spheres she would have reprobated.[10]

The result was a population wholly angry and resentful of the Church: "Thus anyone attacking the Church could count on popular support." The Church's association with the monarchy hurt it because it was a part of a greater societal structure. The structure was engrained throughout the culture, the government, and the land.

Today, most remember Tocqueville for *Democracy in America* and his many flattering comments on the United States. Yet at home, Tocqueville lived in a country still reeling from the revolution that took the lives of many French citizens, including the French King and Queen. For Tocqueville, the Revolution hit especially close to home. His parents were nobility and sympathetic to King Louis XVI. Their sympathy led to

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[10] Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Anchor, 1955).

imprisonment and an expected execution—which never came.[11] Nearly an orphan, Tocqueville could have understandably been bitter towards the revolutionaries, or longed for a return to monarchy. Instead, he took a much more moderate approach, warning about the "tyranny of the majority" while extolling the centralization of government in France that occurred under the Monarchy under Louis XVI. He applied the events of and reasons behind the revolution to his arguments for and against French issues. To Tocqueville, the French Revolution's influence remained omnipresent in French society and politics. To understand the Revolution was to understand France. For him, the French Revolution was not a dusty historical event.

When he wrote *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville was writing in part to address the political problems of France that presented themselves in the events of 1789. Most American readers of *Democracy in America* overlook this fact, that the book was meant to be more than a commentary on the United States; the book was, in essence, a commentary on France and French politics. Kristen Nelson has demonstrated Tocqueville's tendency to omit American events that were irrelevant or problematic to his vision of France's future.[12] This filter through which he saw America can also be seen in some of his oft-cited commentary on religion in the United States. The aspects he saw as positive were aspects he thought would be helpful for France.

The ultimate example of course is that Tocqueville suggested that religion in America thrived precisely because the government was not involved. While he knew that the church-state alliance was terrible for pre-revolution France, Tocqueville believed that

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[11] Isaac Kramnick, introduction to *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, by Alexis de Toqueville, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (London: Penguin Books, 2003), xxxv.
[12] See Kristen Nelson, "'A Knowledge of Everything': Tocqueville and American Girls' Education" (working paper, Presidential Grant, Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, 2006).

France could not return to its prior religious structure. Yet he also felt that France needed religion—it needed to resurrect the Church. In observing and noting the religious culture of the United States, Tocqueville's political prerogative was to convince Frenchmen of a particular philosophy regarding government and religion.

To a Frenchmen, America's decidedly religious nature would have seemed peculiar. Tocqueville, coming from a population where Christianity held less sway in people's lives, noticed the difference between America and France:

> America is… the country in the world where the Christian religion has retained the greatest real power over people's souls and nothing shows better how useful and natural religion is to man, since the country where it exerts the greatest sway is also the most enlightened and free.[13]

This success of American religion intrigued Tocqueville, yet much of his focus is spent addressing the relation of religion—specifically Christianity—to politics and governance. He repeatedly notes how strange it is that priests not only support civil liberties, they also lend no support to politics. He finds it odd that priests would not enter the political realm, but instead, he records, "they take pains to stand aside from public affairs and keep aloof from political parties."[14]

Tocqueville distances French religion from the United States' by frequently noting the place of the separation of church and state in securing the place of Christianity within society.

> In France I had seen the spirit of religion moving in the opposite direction to that of the spirit of freedom. In America, I found them intimately linked together in joint reign over the same land… [M]y view was that all [Catholic priests, French and American,] agreed with each other except over details; but [the American priests] attributed the peaceful influence exercised by religion over their country principally to the separation of Church and state. I assert confidently that, during

[13] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 340.
[14] Ibid., 340.

> my stay in America, I did not meet a single man, priest of layman, who did not agree about that.[15]

However, Tocqueville should not be misunderstood to be anti-Church or anti-establishment. Some of his main points in Democracy in America demonstrate this point. In DIA, one of his main themes, besides the necessity of civil organizations (like religion), is the fear of a "tyranny of the majority." If a society is ruled by the "tyranny of the majority," the common man rules without and any minority viewpoints are oppressed. While he did oppose the government empowering the Church, Tocqueville was far from a populist. Tocqeville, an aristocrat himself, did not side with the vehemently anti-church movements taking place during the French Revolution. Neither did he speak kindly of Europe's religious history.

Addressing France more directly, Tocqueville derides the Church-state relationship that Europeans have seen and resented:

> We have seen religions closely linked to earthly governments, dominating men's souls by both terror and by faith. But when a religion contracts such an alliance, I am not afraid to say that it acts as would a man by sacrificing the future for the present and risks its legitimate authority by gaining a power to which it has no right.[16]

Tocqueville prophetically recognizes the voices in Europe "deploring" the lack of belief. The revolution, although not completely successful, removed much of the Church's power in Europe. Tocqueville is unsure of how to return faith to Europe, but he is certain that it is the "close union of politics and religion" that is responsible for the lack of belief. "In Europe, Christianity has allowed itself to be closely linked with the powers of this world," Tocqueville concludes. "Today these powers are collapsing and it is virtually

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[15] Ibid., 346.
[16] Ibid., 347.

buried beneath their ruins. It has become a living body tied to the dead; if the bonds holding it were cut, it would rise again."[17]

Tocqueville's predictions, although always relevant, were not always so accurate. Isaac Kramnick notes a few of his predictions that proved to be incorrect: "The federal government did not lose strength, nor the presidency; states would never be allowed to leave the Union at will; wars would not become rarer as social conditions became more equal and Americans would tolerate compulsory conscription."[18] Just because his observations on religion remain applicable to today does not necessitate their accuracy. Yet for this study, it is most important to note, as Isaac Kramnick does, that it was Alexis de Tocqueville who was "the first to suggest that the separation of Church and state is the basis of religion's singular importance in America."[19]

The association of church and state and the resentment to Christianity caused by it should not be understood as an event isolated to France. Similar occurrences also happened elsewhere in Europe. In England, Conservatives argued for "the application of Christianity to civil government," and "the adoption of the principles of the Church of England as the groundwork of legislation."[20] In Italy, the Pope was dealt harsh criticism when he declared that his role as secular leader conflicted with his role as "supreme pastor" when he had to decide whether or not to go to war with Austria, another Christian nation. Ultimately, he elected not to go to war, and the public was fiercely upset.[21]

The politics of nations like Italy in the aforementioned incident were forced to into secularism because of the burden religion—Christianity—placed on the ruling

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[17] Ibid., 352.
[18] Kramnick, *Democracy in America*, xxxvi.
[19] Ibid., xxxiv.
[20] Abraham Christopher Wordsworth, quoted in Chadwick, 108.
[21] Chadwick, 120.

parties. The story of Italy's attempts to balance the role of head of state with head of church demonstrates that the close relationship between religion and state may need be abandoned if only for political necessity.

These examples, especially France's, show that governments, for the sake of religion and for the sake of the state, should separate the Church from the state. The result of a close church-state relation in these instances is resentment, but it is also politically difficult to uphold the melding of the roles of the church and the state into one. France's church and monarch ultimately paid the price; the church became, by association, the target of those that were upset at the government. In Italy, a normally secular decision became much more complicated because of Christian theology. Examples like these demonstrate the negative effects of a close church-state relation.

The genealogy behind France's *World Values Survey* statistics is put in a better context by the narrative of France's relationship with the church. France's tumultuous history of a church-state alliance is certainly one of the reasons for the country's present-day secularism. The low rates of belief and attendance make sense in light of the history at hand. However, in order to fully understand the greater role of the separation of church and state, the issue of church-state relationships in the United States must be addressed.

Religious Arguments Addressing the Separation of Church and State

Surprisingly, some the most vehement original supporters of the separation of church and state were Christian Evangelical Baptists. Today, when members of the Christian right advocate prayer in public schools and chide government officials who

wish their constituents a "Happy Holidays" instead of a "Merry Christmas," it seems strange that Baptists would be the defenders of separation. Still, this history must be accounted for. As statistics show, United States citizens are by and large believers; in all the world, they are the most involved in their Churches. Yet many American Christians today are fearful that their religion will be pushed further and further from public culture at the hands of the separation of church and state. They are fearful of becoming France. To understand and dismiss this fear, it is important to understand the separation of church and state can and should be understood with a Christian argument for, not against, it.

In the United States, the argument for a separation of church and state is often described as a campaign against Christianity. The people who espouse this argument are most often conservative and most often Christianity. The argument against the separation of church and state in America often occurs on a public setting when Congress addresses Christianity or God in high profile legislation, or when federal courts make a ruling that in one way or another is interpreted as for or against religion. Many of the separation of church and state debates take place around Christianity and its role in society and government.

The separation of church and state is a common and legally accepted interpretation of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…"[1] This area of the First Amendment that addresses religion and religious liberty is often described in terms of two separate clauses: the Establishment Clause, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," and the Free Exercise Clause,

[1] An online version of the United States Constitution is available at http://www.gpoaccess.gov/constitution/pdf2002/011.pdf.

"…or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." These two clauses in the First Amendment are the subject of a heated and continuing debate over to what extent the government should be separating itself from religion. Recent court battles have taken place over the role of the public schools and religion as well as the role of religious monuments on government grounds.

For the subject I am addressing, there is no need to engage the legal arguments for or against a strict separation of church and state. Instead, what is necessary is to understand the current polarization around the issue, with Christian conservatives arguing against separation and more mainline and secular types arguing for the separation. Fortunately or unfortunately, the argument over the separation of church and state is fairly polarized in the United States.[2]

Most importantly for the subject at hand, those that argue against the separation of church and state tend to believe that the separation is harmful for religion, and more specifically, Christianity. They claim that the separation is a "campaign" against "religious references." Their fear is not the removal of religion from government, but the removal of all Christianity from American life. If there is a "wall" separating church and state, they wish to dismantle it. Some even advocate official, tax-supported religion.[3] To many, the concept of a "separation" of church and state is misleading and detracting from the true American value of religious liberty.[4] Larry Kudlow, the conservative *National Review's* Economics Editor, provides a good example in an article addressing a 2005

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[2] Some are critical of the polarized state of American religion and politics in the United States, and for good reason. However, the United States, many would admit, lacks a strong voice for the "center" of American religion and politics. Although one way to address many of the issues addressed in this paper would be to advocate for a religious "center," this paper does not address that issue. See Pasewark, *The Emphatic Christian Center*.

[3] Cass R. Sunstein, *Radicals in Robes* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 223.

[4] An example of an academic argument against the legal notion of an American separation of church and state is Michael McConnell, "Accommodation of Religion," 1985 *Sup.Ct. Rev*. 1562.

United States Supreme Court case examining whether or not the state of Texas could have monuments to the Ten Commandments at its Capitol and Supreme Court in Austin:

> The Ten Commandments are literally chiseled into the American way of life. But there is a campaign going on that would rid this country of any and all religious references. This is part of the ongoing culture war that would stop religious expression in politics and the public square, even though we remain the most religious of all the major industrial countries. Fortunately, brave people… want to keep it that way.

Kudlow is not worried about the legal particulars of the Supreme Court case at hand. To the contrary, he is worried about the removal of the Judeo-Christian tradition from American life. Kudlow's argument is not a secular one for the solitary reason that he himself is not secular. He strongly believes in the Ten Commandments and that, if anything, their reach should be expanded not contracted. He asks rhetorically,

> Is it such a bad thing to think about not killing, not stealing, not lying, and not committing adultery? Is it so bad to talk about honoring one's parents? Or to think about a power greater than oneself—about God or some higher deity? Or to set aside just one day a week as a spiritual day, separate from the material strivings of the other six days?... Moral commandments—like most spiritual thoughts in this day and age—seem too few and far removed from our usual toils and tribulations… An occasional reminder as to how to do this cannot be a bad thing.[5]

However, Larry Kudlow is only one example. The preponderance of such arguments against the separation of church and state is startling, and nearly all the arguments are variations of the one cited above: that Christianity is a good thing, a historical part of the nation and that those who disagree with us are trying to end religion in America.

As I researched the material available for the research paper, I found the pages of the conservative magazines *The Weekly Standard* and the *National Review* to be full of articles addressing the strict "liberal" interpretation of the separation of church and state in a negative manner, which in and of itself is not surprising. What is interesting is that

[5] Larry Kudlow, "The Big Ten," *National Review*, March 8, 2005.

the arguments against the separation are more often than not about the plight of the Christian faithful. One article says that "if liberal secularism amounts to the unwitting imposition of the view of an irreligious minority on a religious majority, then it hardly seems likely to foster social harmony. Nor has it."[6]

In a review of Kent Greenawalt's *Does God Belong in Public Schools?,* Charamaine Yoest of the *Weekly Standard* describes his "antireligious" interpretation of the history of religion-related issues in the courts. She concludes, "God does belong in public schools. But this book underscores the challenges confronting a religiously heterogeneous society… Kent Greenawalt's inability to excise his own biases, after a self-conscious attempt to provide a dispassionate navigation through a freighted debate, does not bode well for today's inheritors."[7] All that is significant for the claim at hand, that the separation of church and state is good for belief, is that today, those who argue against the separation are the outspoken believers.

However, once, the separation of church and state was supported, not opposed, by Christian arguments. At the dawning of the United States, the religious picture was markedly different from the one today. The Anglican Church, still considering tying itself to England, thrived in the South, while Congregationalists dominated the North. Among the other smaller religious groups, the evangelical Baptists were growing most rapidly, and as Steven Waldman notes, "as the Baptist influence grew, so did the Anglican backlash against it." The persecution this religious minority faced was far from subtle:

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[6] Ramesh Ponnuru, Secularism and Its Discontents," *National Review*, December 27, 2004.
[7] Charamaine Yoest, "The Four Rs; Readin', writin', 'rithmetic, and religion?" *The Weekly Standard,* October 24, 2005.

> In May 1771, an Anglican minister and a sheriff interrupted one Baptist preacher's hymn-singing, put a horsewhip in his mouth and dragged him away from the meeting to be whipped in a nearby field. In Virginia, four Baptist preachers were imprisoned for their emotional sermons… They refused to stop preaching and were sent to jail, singing hymns along the way. They preached to crowds through the barred windows of the jail.[8]

And so, it was natural for evangelicals to support the revolution and even more natural to oppose any sort of establishment of an official religion and sought a separation of church and state.

While religious conservatives today often note that Jefferson's famous line that described the "wall" separating church and state can be found in a letter and not in the Constitution, they often fail to recognize that this letter was in response to another letter written by a group of pro-separation Baptists. Furthermore, it was not just a fear of persecution that led evangelicals to oppose any state involvement with religion. Baptists opposed state involvement on principle. For example, Congress had proposed to allow government aid to any religious organization seeking it. The proposed law, the "assessment law," did not favor one denomination over any other and Baptists were just as eligible for aid as Anglicans and Congregationalists. In the debate over the proposed law, which frighteningly mirrors contemporary American debates over "faith-based initiatives," Baptists opposed its passage:

> …the assessment law had made it clear that Baptists could funnel their taxes to Baptist churches. Rather, the evangelicals believed that Christians were to render unto Caesar what was his—that the religious and political spheres were meant, by Jesus, to be separate. One Baptist petition declared "We do… earnestly declare against [the assessment bill] as being contrary to the spirit of the gospel and the bill of rights."[9]

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[8] Steven Waldman, "The Framers and the Faithful," *Washington Monthly*, April 2006, 4.
[9] Ibid., 6.

Still, the evangelical Baptists, although firm—perhaps "strict"—separatists, should not be understood as the founders of separatist thought. The beginnings of this movement traces itself to the Enlightenment and to the Great Awakening, but it is Roger Williams, the Anglo-American theologian and founder of Providence, Rhode Island, who should be considered the father of the American separatist movement.[10] Williams, who refused to serve churches associated with the Church of England or any church that was an "unseparated church," believed that each individual possessed something called "soul-liberty." Because of the inherent nature of soul-liberty, he believed, it would be wrong to deny any person the choice of what to believe and how.

Williams' concept of soul-liberty is a forefather of the religious freedoms protected by the First Amendment. Although he vehemently believed in God and Christianity, he also firmly believed that no man held the knowledge of God necessary to legislate His will. Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore note correctly that the nation's founders would eventually espouse a similar viewpoint and that they "both in writing the Constitution and in defending it in the ratification debates, sought to separate the operations of government from any claim that human beings can know and follow diving direction in reaching policy decisions."[11]

While many often associate the theoretical foundations of the First Amendment and the protections against religious tyranny with the Enlightenment, it seems that

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[10] However, Americans should be careful not to fall into the trap of American exceptionalism: the (false) idea that the United States is the birth country of the world's now dominant ideas and thoughts. Stephen M. Feldman writes, "I argue that the separation of church and state, whether a principle or not, did not arise first in America, either at the time of the constitutional framing or later. Rather, as a political and religious development, the separation of church and state has slowly evolved throughout western history, beginning with the initial emergence of Christianity as it contentiously separated from Judaism." Feldman, 5.

[11] Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 12.

perhaps more credit should be given to evangelical passion.[12] Dissenting Protestants seemed to have contributed more to religious liberty than the legacy of the Enlightenment. Timothy L. Hall credits Roger Williams instead of Locke, Madison, and Jefferson:

> We therefore cannot pretend to give historical content to the religion clauses without taking seriously their origin, at least in part, in a believing parentage, and Williams is a key theoretician of this parentage.[13]

Ultimately, "one cannot trace the genesis of the American commitment to religious freedom without reckoning the values and presuppositions of Williams and later evangelical Protestants." It is Williams's mode of thought that exalted the notion of religious liberty while targeting the alliance of church and state in government institutions.[14]

This history of Christianity in the United States is significant because of the contemporary focus on the polarization of the debate around separation of church and state around Christianity, opposed, and secular society, as supportive. As has been shown, such was not always the case. This story of the beginning of the separation of church and state in America demonstrates that a Christian argument has not been and need not be opposed to the separation of church and state. Although some would like to draw parallels between the Evangelical Baptists of colonial times to the Baptists of today, I will not do so because of the drastically different political and religious setting of American life today. However, the Evangelical Baptists argument for the separation of church and state effectively displays the religious history in support of the separation.

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[12] Mark DeWolfe Howe, *The Garden and the Wilderness: Religion and Government in American Constitutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 19.
[13] Timothy L. Hall, *Separating Church and State* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 117.
[14] Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 87.

Christianity in America, as it continues to do well, should not blame the separation of church and state for its problems. Rather, it should thank the separation for its strong beginning and continuing success.

The Significance for Today

History, ultimately, is only useful in its application to life today. Any examination of the worthiness of the separation of church and state must confront the question of contemporary significance. The falling guillotine has been halted; the Church of England poses no threat to American religion; and the Baptists of today are far from religiously persecuted. Today's society seems far removed from the history of religion that has bequeathed it. Why is the reexamination of these times worthwhile?

Today's religious issues are certainly not as terrifying as the tyranny of the official Church, and America today has no reason to fear the same direct persecution the Baptists faced. Yet, as the United States faces fundamentalist religious types at home and abroad, the history of the separation of church and state becomes once again pertinent. Furthermore, the increasing amount of religious plurality in the United States will perhaps one day further the struggle between those who wish to see America remain predominantly Christian and those who are indifferent. Britain has already enacted and proposed several laws that many view as anti-Muslim.[15] The rights of a religious majority, if any exist, are at the front of coming debates in the United States as it deals with Islamic terror and increased immigration; Europe's struggles with these issues foreshadow the coming debate in America.

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[15] Richard Ford, "'Britishness test' for imams is abandoned," *The Times*, December 20, 2005, 1; "Brown defends tough terror laws," *Guardian Unlimited*, February 13, 2006.

If anything, the history of religious liberty suggests that the pious and religious still have reason to find stock in the thoughts of Roger Williams. Just as the persecuted minorities of the 17th and 18th centuries discovered, the only way to truly gain religious freedom is from the separation of religion from government.

Contemporary critics of the separation of church and state contend that the framers intended to prevent an establishment of a religion, but meant to allow for the mixing of church and state. Today, these critics would like to seek federal funds for private religious educations or allow prayer in public schools. The framers, they argue, sought religious freedom, not a strict separation. Waldman addresses this criticism saying, "the founders did not agree with one another on how to interpret the First Amendment:"

> John Adams, Patrick Henry, and others believed the First Amendment really was meant to block the formal establishment of an official church, but allowed much mixing of church and state. For instance, Adams endorsed national days of fasting and prayer and appointment of congressional chaplains. Jefferson and Madison were on the other end of the spectrum, demanding the clearest separation of church and state. As president, Jefferson reversed the practice initiated by Washington and Adams, and refused to have a national day of prayer. Madison agreed. He cited the appointment of chaplains as being a direct violation of the "pure principle of religious freedom," especially given how "strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Government in the Constitution of the United States.[16]

The case for the "original intent" of the founders is difficult to make since the Founding Fathers' intent was itself divided on the separation of church and state. Yet "the evangelicals weren't."

The history of the French Revolution should demonstrate the resentment that forced religious participation fosters. Today, that resentment is still present in the resentment some feel towards the domination of Christianity in public discourse. While

[16] Waldman, 7.

the loudest voices are drowning out the softer ones, warning about the removal of Christianity from America, to grant these voices anymore power would risk further disenchanting many Americans, just as France experienced. If an atheistic society were what this country desires, an appropriate solution would be to give religion governmental authority. Instead, America can credit its continually high rates of belief—absolutely and relatively—to the religious freedom granted in this country.

Furthermore, the notion that evangelical Christianity, particular the Baptist denomination, is against the separation of church and state is a relatively recent change from the past. In his history of the recent United States, James Patterson notes that conservative protestant leaders, especially those of the Southern Baptist Convention, were still believers of the separation of church and state into the 1970's: "Fearing that the government would support Catholic schools, they were wary of virtually any public intrusion into the realm of religion, and they supported the Supreme Court's ruling against state-sponsored school prayers."[17] It was not until later, when Jerry Falwell and others "argued that Christians should dive aggressively into the public realm in order to promote Christian values." At first this meant supporting Jimmy Carter, who since he was a self-described "evangelical" would surely act the way all other evangelicals wished. This of course did not happen and soon came the religious anti-abortion crusade, the Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, One Man, One Woman campaign, the religious overtones in the 1984 election of Ronald Reagan and the famously significant role of religious conservatism in the 2004 election of George W. Bush. By looking at these events only, a trend might be drawn through all of American—and Western—

[17] James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 142.

history, that dogmatists seek political power to strengthen their cause. This would be a mistake, however: "At this moment in history, the evangelical involvement in politics is so strong—and their advocacy of greater government support for religion so persistent—it's difficult to remember that this view is relatively recent.[18]

While the rise of the anti-separation of church and state religious right is relatively recent, it is even more important to remember that the most religious country in the world became so religious during 200 years of religious freedom. The separatist ideology, though largely defeated in public religious discourse today, has watched at the United States has remained and grown in its religious ways. If the lessons of the French Revolution and the American experiment have anything to say about the nature of religion and government, it is this: today's Christians are welcome to chart a course of their own, but history—French and American—has set a precedent that to foster religion requires a government separate from and not promoting of religion.

Many arguments can be made against the mixing of church and state theoretically, however, practically, perhaps an even greater criticism can be made. Whose religion would be established? Protestant or Catholic? Reform theology or liberation theology? Evangelical or mainstream? If any brand of religion were mixed with government it would by necessity be a watered down version. It seems that despite calls for a relaxation on the separation of church and state in America, this idea seems irresponsible theoretically and practically improbable.

Christianity in America and abroad may very well have a more difficult time today than those have had in the past, but perhaps the problems Chritsianity is facing today are no more trying than the hardships the religious of the past generation faced.

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[18] Waldman, 8.

While some religious Americans struggle to keep "…under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, few would call this battle nobler than that of the Baptists, who sometimes fought for their physical lives.

No, those who prophesy a decline in Christianity in the United States are not on to something. Surely, as some continue to predict the fall of Christianity, we should be wary of "decline and fall" history. While some will undoubtedly witness a trend as a decline, others will see it as an ascent.[19] It is in this way that the separation of church and state should be viewed, as an ascent of religion beyond the stoic and chained alliance to the governmental state.

[19] Chadwick, 3.

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