

The Charters of Change

A Minute with Jamie



by Jamie Ramirez

They “included the 14th Amendment to include the 1st Amendment” in a seemingly simple little word known as “liberty.” According to the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (www.religioustolerance.org) “The courts have the responsibility to interpret the U.S. Constitution in specific instances. In their ruling in 1947 of *Everson vs. Board of Education of Ewing Twp*, they ruled:

The ‘establishment of religion clause...’ means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. Neither can force nor influence a person to go to or to remain away from church against his will or force him to profess a belief or disbelief in any religion. No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or non-attendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. Neither a state nor the Federal Government can, openly or secretly, participate in the affairs of any religious organizations or groups and vice versa.

In the White House the implication of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships is an office that is part of the Executive Office of the President of the United States.

Continued on page 24...

newer ideas when it comes to religion, who gets to have a say in matters? What is the right church? Even during this time other denominations had already come up and were fighting for their place. “You have different churches established in different states. Basically in Southern States and part of New York Anglicanism was established, in New England it was congregationalism, Rhode Island; no church established, Pennsylvania; no church established. In Virginia, even though Anglicanism was established, you have Presbyterianism in the hill country, and you have a rising Baptist movement, and Methodism was becoming popular on the frontier. So within Virginia you have religious people that are not Anglican, that are agitating for the separation of church and state,” says Professor Pettibone.

Thomas Jefferson was one of the most supportive of minority religions. He wrote up the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom and of course was the author of the Declaration of Independence. He and James Madison were both for disestablishment. They saw that the separation of church and state, and freedom of religion as “two sides of the same coin.” They felt that there could be no real religious freedom without this separation.

Patrick Henry brought up the idea of not only paying the salaries of Anglican ministers, but paying the salaries of all the teachers of the Christian religion. Madison felt this was wrong and opposed this idea. He felt that if your tax dollars were going towards ideas you didn’t agree with, it was wrong. As clearly stated in the First Amendment “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” Government money does not go to churches. In the 20th century the Supreme Court began to interpret what this means.

lic fasting and thanksgiving, appointed by civil authority, on penalty of five shillings, for every instance of neglect.”

The colonists started to feel the encroaching power of the royal crown. They were being taxed for wars they wanted nothing to do with, the housing and feeding of troops without permission and anything else a king a thousand miles away could hold them accountable for. They got tired of this tyranny and his rule over a land that was separate, yet still part of his kingdom. They felt this could not rightfully be so. They felt like they had been taking care of themselves just fine for over a hundred years in this New World and it was time that they claimed it for themselves.

“The fifty-four men who composed the First Continental Congress represented different interests, religions, and regions; they held conflicting opinions as to how best restore their rights. Most did not know each other; some did not like each other. With no history of successful cooperation, they struggled to overcome their differences and, without any way of knowing if the future held success or nooses for them all, they started down a long and perilous road towards independence.” This quote was taken from the National Archives website www.archives.gov. This is a short commentary about the human factor when it came to writing up the charters and finally cutting away from the rule of England. Even at the same time, in the 1800’s many in the United States could not imagine a state without church establishment because up to a very recent point in history, there was an established state church, for many states. Though there was toleration of other denominations, there was still a position of preference the established church of the state held. This was a problem. Because of the start of revivalism and the building of

ing fathers wanted to happen in the future of the country and if they either had a union or a separation in mind when writing up the Charters of Freedom. Consideration needs to be given to so many factors that there is simply not enough room to talk about them here. These would have been everything from the quality of life at the time to what Europe was doing during the time of the Revolution. However, I would like to mention one factor. According to esteemed Masonic writer Manley P. Hall in *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, he states that out of all the signers of the Declaration of Independence there was only one non-mason signature. Some say this number might be too high. Still, it is well known that many of the Founding Fathers were Freemasons. It is also well known that out of all of the requirements to joining the fraternity, one of the most important is a belief in a Supreme Being. This is a generic term, just as the Fathers found their Supreme Being to be a generic being. This wasn’t a belief in a man sitting on clouds, with a white beard. This image is a throwback to Greek and Norse mythology and the images of Zeus and one-eyed Odin. They believed in an “Architect of the Universe,” a more natural being. Not necessarily a being that is only about judgment and jealousy.

However, even with some believing in different ideas about God, there was still a control the government of England had over the colonies when it came to worship.

In a book titled *A History of the United States*, Reverend Charles A. Goodrich writes, “After the settlement of several colonies, all persons were obliged by law to contribute to the support of the church. Special care was taken that all persons should attend public worship. In Connecticut the law obliged them to be present on the Lord’s day—all days of pub-

Christian to convert to another religion, etc. From then on there was a clear union between these two institutions of the Christian church and the governing state.

The Church reigned supreme. It became a hammer that would rain judgment upon all who weren’t of the clergy or ruling parties. Free thinking was punished by torture and death and any ideas that questioned the rules of the church could leave one black bagged and broken. In Europe, and elsewhere, it was assumed that if you were born in Europe you were Catholic, unless you were Jewish. This was the general consensus thinking until a certain few decided that this wasn’t right.

The first to bring about the idea of separation of church and state were the Waldensians. This group was the precursor to the Reformation, even before Martin Luther. Martin Luther wanted some distance but not complete distance. This is evident in his closeness to the Catholic faith. Eventually, the Anabaptists came to strongly advocate and see it as a real separation. This was also the case with many of the first Baptist churches. They felt religion was a personal decision. Just because a baby is born in a certain place doesn’t mean they should be part of a certain church. People have a choice. This is the key in their belief system.

Roger Williams was one of the first people to strongly advocate this at the beginning of the United States. “He believed the first four commandments were none of the government’s business.” He felt that the church needed to be protected from the government. In turn decisions made by the state could be determined by religious biases. When you have union between church and state, the state is making decisions for the church and vice versa.

One of the big questions in this issue is what the found-

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment or 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.”--1st Amendment of the Bill of Rights.

Since before we could even remember, spirituality has been a part of our human heritage. We have always wanted explanations for things we would experience and see, but could not understand. Legends and myths were created to explain certain phenomena and these myths were always seen as true. Generations told generations, and eventually the myths and stories were taken to be real because there was no memory of anything else. Cities were built on these principles; whole civilizations of believers came into being. In Egypt, statues were built in reverence to these beings and the pharos were considered gods, or at least a descendant of gods. In Rome, the “genius” of Caesar would have been worshiped. In all there was a state religion. The religion of the country was the religion the citizens were considered.

Christianity, one of the most populated religions with billions in its membership, did not have much of a say in governments and states. It was a touchy relationship between Christianity and government, mainly Christians being persecuted and the government doing the persecution. Constantine was the first to legalize Christianity. He did not unite the two, he simply stopped their persecutions. According to Professor Pettibone, Head of the History Department at Southern Adventist University, Theodosius I (379 -382 A.D) was who eventually united church and state. He passed laws with Christianity in mind, outlawed pagan worship, made it illegal for a