

## Appendix

### Pluralism Lesson Plan: Exercise 1, Assignment

---

Jefferson's correspondence with the Danbury Baptists, as narrated by Frank Lambert in *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2003, Pages 284-87.

---

#### Jefferson's Correspondence with the Danbury Baptists

"After his election, Jefferson received many letters from evangelicals expressing appreciation for his firm support of religious liberty. It was in response to one of those letters that he used the metaphor of a *wall of separation between church and state*. Many accommodationists and conservatives on the *religious right* have made much of the point that only Jefferson imposed a *wall*, and that he did so only once, in response to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut. Applying the same sort of literal reading of historic documents as that they give Scripture, people like Pat Robertson note that the metaphor does not appear in the Constitution or elsewhere, and, therefore, the Jeffersonian interpretation must be idiosyncratic. They fail, however, to note that while the word *wall* is unique, the sentiment that it expresses was widespread among Americans, especially within evangelical groups.

Indeed, when one examines the Danbury Baptist's letter, one sees that Jefferson's response simply echoed many of their strong statements against any government voice regarding religion. First, the Baptists expressed their views on religious freedom:

*'Our Sentiments are uniformly on the side of Religious Liberty – That Religion is at all times and places a matter between God and individuals – That no man ought to suffer in name, person, or effects on account of his religious opinions – That the legitimate Power of civil government extends no further than to punish the man who works ill to his neighbor.'*

Having stated their position, the Baptists then complained of their lack of religious liberty in Connecticut, one of the states that retained a religious establishment. Noting that the state's constitution continued to reflect the *Laws and usages* of its *ancient* charter, they described religion's place in that state:

*'Religion is considered as the first object of Legislation; and therefore what religious privileges we enjoy (as a minor part of the State) we enjoy as favors granted, and not as inalienable rights: and these favors we receive at the expense of such degrading acknowledgements, as are inconsistent with the rights of freemen.'*

They concluded by asserting that the government *'dare not assume the prerogatives of Jehovah and make Laws to govern the Kingdom of Christ.'* In other words, church and state are separate, with God as head of the former and a magistrate as head of the latter.

Jefferson also echoed the sentiments of the Baptist minister John Leland, who based his views of religious liberty on biblical principles and the Lockean idea of the social compact. Thus he framed the questions: *'Does a man, upon entering into social compact, surrender his conscience to that society, to be controlled by the laws thereof; or can he, in justice, assist in making laws to bind his children's consciences before they are born?'* His answer in the negative contained the heart of his argument: *'Every man must give an account of himself to God, and therefore every man ought to be at liberty to serve God in a way that he can best reconcile to his conscience. If government can answer for individuals at the day of judgment, let men be controlled by it in religions matters; otherwise, let men be free.'* He concluded with the statement that Jefferson had paraphrased in the campaign and the Federalists had singled out for attack: *'Let every man speak freely without fear, maintain the principles that he believes, worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God, or twenty Gods: and let government protect him in so doing.'*

Also, like Jefferson and the Danbury Baptists, Leland and his cobelievers in Massachusetts considered the marketplace of ideas, not the government, to be the arena and arbiter of religious debate. Having lived under Virginia's then Massachusetts's constitutions, which discouraged religious pluralism through *proscriptions, fines, [and] confiscations*, Leland advocated a state that promoted free discussion wherein a *'man [could] bring forth his arguments and maintain his points with all boldness; then, if his doctrine is false, it will be confuted, and if it is true (though ever so novel,) let others credit it.'* Only religious error needs government protection. Leland wrote that *'whenever men fly to the law or sword to protect their system of religion, and focus it upon others, it is evident that they have something in their system that will not bear the light, and stand upon the basis of truth.'* He certainly did not want Massachusetts Congregationalists to define religious standards for office holders. Leland lived to see Massachusetts disestablish religion by constitutional amendment in 1833.

Though New England dissenters including Baptists supported Jefferson, many did so despite strong disagreement with many of his religious views. William McLoughlin's recent study of New England Baptists highlights some of those differences. He points out that *'[m]any Baptists disagreed with Jefferson...that religious liberty should include the right to hold office even for Jews, Mohammedans, deist, atheists, and infidels.'* Moreover, unlike Jefferson, Baptists *'believed that if [America] was not a Christian nation it should be.'* They supported state laws *'against theater-going, blasphemy, disturbing the Sabbath, card playing and gambling.'* Many New England Baptists did care very much whether Jefferson believed in twenty gods or no god."