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<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20081128/OPINION01/811280342/1036/OPINION>

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When Politics and Religion were Mixed Thoroughly

The Register's Headline: Religion, politics mixed to give birth to freedom

By Dave Leach

Once upon a time, politics and religion were mixed, and freedom as we know it was born.

When freedom's parents later gave thanks, it was not just for a bountiful harvest.

The religion in the mix was a sect of Christianity which practiced a level of individual liberty not seen in the world for centuries. After the mixing it receded into obscurity after only a couple of generations. But during this brief window of opportunity, while Freedom of Religious Expression, Equality for All, and the Selection by We The People of their own leaders was the dominant theology in a relatively independent community, a government was born as free as the theology which birthed it.

The year was 1620.

The place was the cold cabin of the Mayflower, anchored a mile and a half from Plymouth Rock.

The document they signed, giving birth to what we today call "freedom", is called the Mayflower Compact.

What is so significant about this simple, 200 word charter which says nothing about presidents, courts, or congress?

It's not only what it says, but also who signed it. It pledged signers to cooperate in forming their own government, which was unthinkable enough for subjects of a king. Then it invited *all* men to sign. Not just church members, but nonmembers. Not just free men, but servants. Not just the rich, but the poor. Not just nobles, but commoners. The least signed alongside the greatest.

Not even just men, but all heads of household, is implied by the fact that although there were no female heads of household in 1620, Elizabeth Warren was allowed to vote after her husband Richard (my ancestor) died in 1627, leaving her with 7 children.

Not only did all participate in managing their government, but they had Freedom of Speech to discuss and criticize the leaders they chose.

Each one of these innovations were capital crimes everywhere else. Some argue that events pressured the Pilgrims to experiment with freedom for their own survival, but freedom has always enhanced survival, without persuading the world to adopt it for so slight an incentive. The Jamestown colonists in 1607 dropped off like flies because the "nobles" wouldn't work alongside their servants, but that didn't persuade them to try Freedom.

Why wasn't Freedom unthinkable at Plimoth? Because for a generation, they had seen it work

very well in their church. Not only did all church members have an equal voice in the selection of their own pastors, but they enjoyed Freedom of Religious Expression through a “prophesying service”, in which members freely discussed the Bible, and sometimes its application to current individual and community problems they were facing. The discussion was not obliged to agree with the pastor, nor were topics limited to those chosen by the pastor. Theirs was like the “prophesying” described in 1 Corinthians 14. Their European pastor, John Robinson, based it on Acts 13:14.

That much freedom was heresy elsewhere. And today it is rejected by over 99% of Christians because “it will never work”. But while it was dominant in a small community a government was born which did not slip into obscurity with its theological parents, but inspired all the governments of America, and eventually the world.

Over the centuries, it was that free government, directly, and the theology that birthed it, indirectly, that inspired most nations to throw off their absolute monarchs and try out various levels of freedom, and inspired most religions to stop torturing “unbelievers”.

We owe them thanks.

Dave Leach is Elder of the Iowa Mayflower Society. He was an Iowa delegate to the triennial Mayflower Society Congress in September.

Introduction to comment stream: I personally consider the questions/challenges put to me brilliant. But then I am prejudiced, because they are pretty much the same questions I asked myself, as I eased myself into this issue. Therefore, I recognize the questions as sincere in motive, and intelligent in character.

Stumpjack wrote:

Thanks for this interesting piece, A book I suggest for those interested in learning more about the complexity of thought among early Puritans I suggest WORDY SHIPMATES, by Sarah Vowell. The eventual founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams, was very much an advocate for equality of all religions - including native - in the colonies. However, he was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony by John Winthrop for such heresies. Interestingly, the two remained friends with much correspondence over the years of friendly theological debate. The colonial Puritans not surprisingly defy any stereotype. They could burn 700 Pequot men, women, and children to death in their huts to avenge the killing of one white man. But they could also be a model of tolerance and equality the Mr. Leach describes.

11/28/2008 7:49:46 AM

another_patriot wrote:

As with most fairy tales, this one began with 'Once upon a time'. Thanks to Stumpjack for reminding 'and now for the rest of the story'.

11/28/2008 8:21:09 AM

IowaExpat wrote:

Yes, we owe the Puritans thanks -- for a work ethic and a sense of community that helped them survive the harsh New England winters, and which remains with many of us today. But history must also hold them accountable for their intolerance. It was Roger Williams, and not the Puritans who banished him, who inaugurated the "lively experiment" that had never been tried anywhere else in the world, namely the creation of a society where all people (not just Christians) have freedom of conscience. And, the

horrors of the Salem witch trials show us that the theocracy of the Puritans could also be an instrument of violence, and that any kind of theocracy does not transmit well to subsequent generations.

11/28/2008 8:23:16 AM

[MrClean](#) wrote:

This was a good piece, and I second the motion to take Stumpjacks's suggestion and read Vowell's book. There were several interesting experiments in the early colonies that mixed politics and religion with mixed results. (other than they all eventually failed.)

However, the statement "freedom as we know it was born" by the Puritan experiment is quite debatable. Freedom existed in many societies going back to ancient times, and usually the mixture of religion and politics had a tendency to squelch it for some..

11/28/2008 8:49:28 AM

[Buckey](#) wrote:

Yeah, those were the days. You could accuse someone of being a witch and presto chango the frenzy it created in all those "pure" Puritans would dispatch said individual to their "reward". Sort of like early groupthink - either your with us or ... off with their head. Theology based "free" government. You are free to think and say whatever you want, as long as it agrees with the wise ones (refer to Roger Williams and how Rhode Island came to be). As the authors title states "Religion, politics mixed to give birth to freedom" - the whole point of the Puritans going to the New World was to get away from the politics of the Old World. I hope the author implies only that we should thank the Puritans for contributing some political theory to the framers of our government, and not that we should emulate them in our current state.

11/28/2008 9:54:01 AM

[sanityindesmoines](#) wrote:

Replying to MrClean:

This was a good piece, and I second the motion to take Stumpjacks's suggestion and read Vowell's book. There were several interesting experiments in the early colonies that mixed politics and religion with mixed results. (other than they all eventually failed.)

However, the statement "freedom as we know it was born" by the Puritan experiment is quite debatable. Freedom existed in many societies going back to ancient times, and usually the mixture of religion and politics had a tendency to squelch it for some..

True, unfortunately the Puritans emigrated to escape religious persecution and soon began to practice it on everyone else, even to the extent of hanging quakers, pressing "heretics" under doors with heavy stones and banishing the politically incorrect out into the untamed wilderness.

Too often those who pass for Puritans today would rather emulate what their forebears actually DID rather than what they aspired to.

11/28/2008 10:05:27 AM

[Biblenut](#) wrote:

The "Pilgrims" and the "Puritans" were very different groups. The Pilgrims did not persecute believers who disagreed with them, or even atheists who disagreed with them. The Pilgrims, about whom I wrote, landed in the Mayflower in 1620. Actually that is our name of convenience for them, based on a statement by their pastor, John Robinson, that they were LIKE pilgrims. Their own name for themselves was "Separatists". Their very name underlines the passionate distinction between them and the Puritans. The Puritans thought the repressive Church of England had great potential but just needed to be purified, the challenge they accepted. The Separatists wanted nothing to do with it, but started from scratch with their own church government. In the New World, the Puritans were the Separatists' neighbors to the South.

The Separatists were only half the Pilgrims. The other half ranged in belief from Church of England to Atheism.

Theologies matter. Both led to Heaven; one led to Freedom.

11/28/2008 12:58:39 PM

[another_patriot](#) wrote:

Thanks for supplying the fodder for some good reading and a look at a part of US history that I wasn't familiar enough with, Biblenut. Again, while what was written here is a good tale, it's incomplete without the 'rest of the story' that I wouldn't have known otherwise.

"It has been said that though God cannot alter the past, historians can; it is perhaps because they can be useful to Him in this respect that He tolerates their existence."— Samuel Butler

11/28/2008 2:19:04 PM

[Biblenut](#) wrote:

Roger Williams was exiled for his theology by the Puritans, not Plimoth's Separatists, who accepted him as their assistant pastor until 1633! He left only to go bother the Puritans, who exiled him in 1635 for telling them to stop requiring a religious test before someone could vote, and physically punishing heresy. Williams was hardly the first in the New World to conceive such liberty! Plimoth Colony had practiced it for over 10 years before Williams arrived on February 5, 1631!

www.u-s-history.com calls this "complete separation of church and state", but the boundaries of that phrase have changed a lot over time.

Williams also told the Puritans their colony was illegitimate because they had not paid the Natives for it. This must have been a difficult concept for the Natives, too, who had no concept of "land ownership" in which one might erect a fence around a portion of land in order to keep others from using it. The Separatists, by contrast, had been led to unoccupied land.

11/28/2008 3:56:17 PM

(Not used: Williams was such a theological wanderer that later, even after starting his denomination, the first Baptist church in the New World, he left it within a year! <> MSN Encarta, source)

[Swindon](#) wrote:

My understanding there were separatists, notably John Winthrop, among the majority of Puritans not wanting (or daring) to break all bonds with the Church of England. So I don't think it is that easy to differentiate Puritan en mass that way. Then again, I haven't written a book about it. By the way, what is the name of your book?

Rhode Island was the last state to ratify the Constitution holding out for a Bill of Rights guaranteeing the right to religious freedom would continue. Jews who'd come to Rhode Island for religious rights wrote Jefferson asking what their status would be in the new United States. He replied their religion would be more than tolerated as by Rhode Island (their religious wars were verbal but still fierce), because the government of the U.S. "gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance". If only we stayed true to that. At least this discussion's been remarkably free of that.

11/28/2008 5:30:32 PM

Biblenut wrote:

Your distinction is important, that the difference that gave birth to Freedom is not any stark difference between all the individuals of one community, and all the individuals of another. There is some unknowable but critical mass of spiritual maturity, something like the 51% majority of a democracy except fortunately the percentage is much lower, that drives a nation. For example during the Revolution only about 20% were Christians, yet the nation pulled together behind Bible scholars who created laws based on Biblical principles. Genesis 18:23-32 says 10 righteous people could have saved Sodom; there weren't that many, even though Lot's family numbered 10. If there were Separatist-leaning Puritans, they either weren't dedicated enough or numerous enough. By contrast, half the Pilgrims were Separatists dedicated enough to face years of persecution in England before coming here, and willing to settle here rather than return with the ship after a hard winter that slew half of them.

11/28/2008 8:04:48 PM

Not submitted: Genesis 19:⁸ Behold now, I have **two daughters which have not known man**; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as *is* good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. ⁹ And they said, Stand back. And they said *again*, This one *fellow* came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, *even* Lot, and came near to break the door. ¹⁰ But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. ¹¹ And they smote the men that *were* at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. ¹² And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? **son in law**, and thy **sons**, and thy **daughters**, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring *them* out of this place: ¹³ For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. ¹⁴ And Lot went out, and spake unto his **sons in law**, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law. Total: Lot, wife, 2 virgin daughters, 2 married daughters, 2 sons in law, 2 sons.

MrClean wrote:

Biblenut, thanks for the details...this was very interesting. Although I completely disagree with you that the laws from our Revolution were written by Biblical scholars based on Biblical principles. More than anything else, they were based on English common law.

11/28/2008 8:52:27 PM

Biblenut wrote:

Universities in those days required, in their ENTRANCE exam, that the applicant be able to translate fluently from New Testament Greek into Latin, a requirement which hardly any seminary GRADUATES today can meet. So by our standards, they were Bible scholars. Historian David Barton, of www.Wallbuilders.com, cites a Texas study of who our Founders quoted. Far more than any other source, it was the Bible. Blackstone came second, who himself wrote about the Biblical principles embedded in English Common Law. The Common Law itself is quite a mix of sources. When missionaries first encountered the Anglos, they found a barbaric culture which honored fighting and drinking. Kind of a Junior High motorcycle gang. They worked hard and patiently over the centuries to lift their culture up. Black's Law Dictionary, 4th Edition, tells under "hundreds" of a kind of

participatory democracy the Saxons practiced alongside their kings, for centuries, like what Jethro recommended to Moses in Exodus 18.

11/29/2008 12:02:36 AM

[another_patriot](#) wrote:

So as not to be misleading, Biblenut, it might be worth mentioning that books didn't exist in 1620 in the ubiquitous way we think of them now. Nor did reading or education, for that matter. The bible was the only book that most homes owned a copy of, and both literature and education tended to be for the elite few compared to today. What free education existed was through the churches and religious groups, and was carefully controlled. The religion of and religious quotations by the founders of this country are something I've done a lot of research on, and any time someone suggests, even indirectly, that this was a nation founded by and for strict Christians my hackles go up. For every biblical quote that can be attributed to those we think of as the 'big names' in the founding of this country, ten can be found where they mock organized Christian Religion.

11/29/2008 12:55:16 AM

[another_patriot](#) wrote:

I appreciate the thrust of your comments, but another way of looking at it would be that while the churches of Europe ruled the land, men were communicating among themselves that there must be a better way and using what they knew, the bible and the Christian religion, to develop those ideas. That men would develop an ideal in which to govern themselves in no way lessens the impact of Abraham, or Christ or Allah, for that matter.

11/29/2008 1:08:06 AM

[Louise](#) wrote:

Saying that the Separatists settled on "unoccupied land" doesn't really tell the true story. This is from Wikipedia, but I've read the same thing in other sources.

"Resuming exploration...the (Separatist) party crossed over to the mainland and surveyed the area that ultimately became the settlement...the land had already been cleared, and the tall hills provided a good defensive position. The cleared village, known as Patuxet to the Wampanoag people, was abandoned about three years earlier following a plague that killed all of its residents. Because the disease involved hemorrhaging,[47] the "Indian fever" is assumed to have been fulminating smallpox introduced by European traders. The outbreak had been severe enough that the colonists discovered unburied skeletons in abandoned dwellings.[48] With the local population in such a weakened state, the colonists faced no resistance to settling there."

11/29/2008 1:15:55 AM

[Primewonk1](#) wrote:

Biblenut - I noticed you referenced David Barton and Wallbuilders. Do you agree with him that the wall of separation between church and state is a "one way wall"?

11/29/2008 11:33:17 AM

[Stumpjack](#) wrote:

Sorry to add to the pile of questions, Biblenut, but your citing that during the revolution only 20 percent were Christian. I find that very interesting and it leads me to wonder if that's because, like many founders, many of them were Deists. Do you know the religiosity or lack thereof of the remaining 80

percent. Also, I would love to know the source so I can study this more too.

I bet those usually seeking to insult and drag down discussions took a look, thought this was too boringly educational, and left. I really appreciate this on-line discussion and wish there were more like this. Thanks to everyone!

11/29/2008 12:09:23 PM

Biblenut wrote:

To "another patriot": I'd be interested in your sources for our Founders being so anti-God. (Perhaps without these word limits: my email is music@saltshaker.us.) My impression to the contrary comes from David Barton, whom I've often heard talk about a professor who organized his students compiling and categorizing their quotes. I can't find a link to it at the moment but here's a link to a less thorough article: <http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=161>

I have pondered whether, as the European charter states, Christianity was merely one source of our freedom, or whether indeed the Bible, alone of the world's religions, spells out the election of our leaders and the freedom of speech and religious expression which we enjoy. In other words, did man improve upon God, or merely finally mature to God's standards?

I would welcome dialog about this, through email, and also through any of you on my TV show, The Uncle Ed. Show, on Mediacom ch. 15, Tue 9:30pm and Sat 4pm.

11/29/2008 3:29:32 PM

Not used: Ben Franklin, "Deist"? "...In the beginning of the Contest with G. Britain, when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection. "Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a Superintending providence in our favor. To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth- that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that "except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it." I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel:..." <http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=98>

Biblenut wrote:

To Louise: Your account is how I remember it. Why do you think it "untrue" to describe the land as "unoccupied"?

To Primewonk1: I don't remember that phrase, but the 1st Amendment itself doesn't restrict ANYONE'S freedom of religious expression. "Establishment of religion" meant forcing citizens to attend, and tithe to, a particular church. If all of us felt free to reason with each other from the highest principles we know, instead of staying comfortably low, conversations would be more interesting and our national vision less divided.

To Stumpjack: I've heard Barton mention a like figure; I heard author Peter Marshall mention 20% in a speech on Tamara Scott's 940 AM radio show Friday. (I doubt the margin of error is only 3%.) Barton fights the notion that very many Founders were Deists. The leading one was Ben Franklin, yet he is the one who persuaded the Constitutional Convention to pray for God's active intervention!

<http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=98>

11/29/2008 3:36:27 PM

Primewonk1 wrote: Replying to Biblenut:

To “another patriot”: I’d be interested in your sources for our Founders being so anti-God. (Perhaps without these word limits: my email is music@saltshaker.us.) My impression to the contrary comes from David Barton, whom I’ve often heard talk about a professor who organized his students compiling and categorizing their quotes. I can’t find a link to it at the moment but here’s a link to a less thorough article:
<http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=161>

I'm always a little leary of folks who quote Barton, and use him as a source of other quotes. He does have a bit of history of making up quotes concerning us being a Christian nation.

11/29/2008 3:34:28 PM

Biblenut wrote:

(That was a pretty fast response!) I hope you are also leery of folks who casually accuse Barton of making up quotes. I’ve followed some of that debate, and I must say I’ve never heard of anyone who is as conscientious about withdrawing Founder’s quotes which he can’t document. See <http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=126> But who asks you to believe me or Barton? I point you to Barton as the source of cites to primary sources. Believe them. But my original subject was the Separatists, about which Barton says little.

11/29/2008 3:52:30 PM

Primewonk1 wrote: Replying to Biblenut:

(That was a pretty fast response!) I hope you are also leery of folks who casually accuse Barton of making up quotes. I’ve followed some of that debate, and I must say I’ve never heard of anyone who is as conscientious about withdrawing Founder’s quotes which he can’t document. See <http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=126> But who asks you to believe me or Barton? I point you to Barton as the source of cites to primary sources. Believe them. But my original subject was the Separatists, about which Barton says little.

The problem is that for every quote (and false quote from Barton) from our founding fathers about how we are a christian nation, we can find a corresponding quote basically saying the opposite, usually by the same guy. 11/29/2008 4:15:43 PM

Biblenut wrote:

If you have researched this and found many anti-God quotes from our Founders, please email them to me. Your statement, taken at face value, has expanded beyond merely maligning Barton, to saying even the accurate quotes are all contradicted by our Founder’s own opposite statements. In other words, not a one of them can decide what they believe. Are you really willing to stick to such a blanket accusation? That can’t even be said of the most dishonest of TODAY’S politicians. We can find SOME of their statements which contradict others, but not “EVERY quote”!

One original source which makes me slow to accept your dark thesis is the Supreme Court case, CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY V. UNITED STATES, 143 U. S. 457 (1892). Read it at <http://supreme.justia.com/us/143/457/> This amazing 9-page case analyzes American history, including

“opening sessions...with prayer”, Sabbath laws even for government, the number of churches and missionaries, and concludes flatly, “this is a Christian nation”.

11/29/2008 6:39:30 PM

Stumpjack wrote:

For those interested, the full text of Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptists can be found via this link to the page on the Library of Congress website:

<http://www.loc.gov/loc/cib/9806/danpre.html>

There is no notion contained about the wall being one way. If that was Jefferson's belief there should be a source to site.

11/29/2008 6:40:34 PM

Biblenut wrote:

I am unclear what you mean by a "one way wall", or what you think Barton means by it. If I were to guess what the phrase might mean, which makes sense, I would guess, "the church is free to influence the state by its persuasion of lawmakers and voters, but the state is not free to coerce the church by its police, courts, and prisons." Is that a reasonable guess?

11/29/2008 6:48:48 PM

ponders wrote:

This was an interesting discussion to follow, and hard to keep my limited knowledge to myself. I would hope it does not get hung up on Barton. There have been some very thought provoking comments, and some good sites to visit. Too often the only facts that are accepted are those which fit "my" pre-conceived ideas (my personal problem with what I read of Barton). To all who contribute here, Thank you.

11/30/2008 9:10:41 AM

Primewonk1 wrote:

Ponders - here are a couple links that may give you an idea of why I think the intermingling of religion and government are a very bad mix. They link to a couple pages stored at the Library of Congress and are from the laws from the Massachusetts Colonies:

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/vc006523.jpg>

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/vc006524.jpg>

Some of my favorites - If you worship any god, but the right god - death. If you commit blasphemy - death. If you deny creation - death. Gay? Yep, death. Unless of course you were forced to have gay sex, then you're just severely punished. Over 16 and curse mom or dad - death. If your son is stubborn or rebellious? Once again - death. But stubborn daughters seem to get a free pass.

If I'm not mistaken, many of these same laws are in place in other theocracies in the Middle East today. And to think some folks get upset when we evolve as a society.

11/30/2008 3:54:23 PM

Biblenut wrote:

“another patriot” worried that I think “this was a nation founded by and for strict Christians”. That is not what is meant when this is called “a Christian nation” by me, by the Supreme Court, or by Moslem terrorists. We mean our values, laws, citizens, and institutions fit the Bible more than other value

systems. All religions are not alike. The Bible inspires “equal protection of the laws” for all (Ex 12:49, De 17:18), elections (Acts 6:5, 15:25, see “known” in De 1:15), and freedom of speech (governments who punished prophets critical of them were portrayed as evil). Freedom finds no security in Humanism or Communism, with its “survival of the fittest” theology. Or Relativism, which respects the rights of others only when that “feels” right. Or Islam, which denies rights to Christians, Jews, and women. Or Hinduism, which honors “duty” defined by the caste into which one is born, which is oppressive if you are an “untouchable”. It is other systems which favor their followers.

11/30/2008 3:57:36 PM

Primewonk1 wrote:

Biblenut - how do you reconcile your statement about freedom of speech with 1 Corinthians 14:33 The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

11/30/2008 4:37:58 PM

Primewonk1 wrote:

Replying to Biblenut:

Freedom finds no security in Humanism or Communism, with its “survival of the fittest” theology.

How in the world do you get that humanism is survival of the fittest theology? Humanism is simply the philosophy of the worth and dignity of all humans. Survival of the fittest is a misunderstanding of Dawin's theory of evolution. In fact evolution makes no such claim. Evolution is simply a change in alleles over time. It is the ability to survive just a little bit better, a tiny bit better in a particular ecological niche and survive long enough to pass on your genetic material to fertile offspring.

11/30/2008 4:46:27 PM

Primewonk1 wrote:

Biblenut - Acts 15:24 We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. 25So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul.

And you get free elections from this how? In your bible, old or new testament, there isn't much on real free elections. Then again, it's pretty skimpy on the whole democracy thing. Seems to me that Article VI, Section 3 of the US Constitution is pretty clear in what it says. No religious test. For any office.

Let's also not forget what it says in the Treaty of Tripoli.

11/30/2008 5:22:41 PM

Biblenut wrote:

Sorry I didn't catch your interaction until now. I had thought this comment stream was surely dead. Great questions! www.Saltshaker.US/BibleStudies/ICOR-2.htm is my analysis of 1 Corinthians 14, resolving the seeming contradiction with the prophetesses in the church, and Deborah, Israel's Judge/ruler.

I have never heard an evolutionist disassociate himself from “survival of the fittest”. I suspect none

would think of doing so, without Christian influence. Or attributing human dignity to Humanism. Humanists will assert their own dignity in the face of Biblical criticism, but will not stand up for the sacredness of the life of an unborn baby carried by a cold-hearted mother, or an old, crippled, “useless eater”.

“we all agreed to choose” is a Democratic process. It is no Papal decision. In Moses' system of judges the leaders were “known”, a profound word meaning a very intimate relationship. Black's Law confirms participation by all as Moses' "hundreds" made it to England.
12/1/2008 7:42:17 AM

Biblenut wrote:

The Treaty of Tripoli is a statement to Moslem pirates which denies America is a Christian nation “in any sense” of any “character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen [Muslims].” Certainly America was never “Christian” in the sense that theirs were Moslem nations. Theirs were Moslem nations in the sense that Christians in them were persecuted, tortured, and enslaved. Indeed, all the Christian nations of Europe, which the Moslem pirates were at war, denied freedom of worship to other Christian denominations, much less Islam. The U.S, by contrast, offered so much freedom to Moslems that a Moslem, John Randolph, was elected to Congress from 1799-1834, even during hostilities with Moslems! Just like Obama, with his Moslem name and associations, was elected during our hostilities with Moslem terrorists.

David Barton makes different points about the treaty: see
<http://www.wallbuilders.com/LIBissuesArticles.asp?id=125>
12/1/2008 7:47:05 AM

Not used: The Treaty of Tripoli, a statement to Moslems, specifies a narrow sense in which it means America is not a Christian nation: “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 [hatred] against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen [Muslims]...”

Biblenut wrote:

Primewonk1 said “I think the intermingling of religion and government are a very bad mix” because it leads to execution of sodomites, rebellious children, etc. First, can we finally dispose of this terminology of WHETHER we ought to mix religion and government, and acknowledge that no law can be conceived of without reference to SOME value system? The logical issue is not whether, but WHICH value system to codify. Second, as to whether the Bible is a fit standard, and whether the Puritans applied it correctly in these cases: John 8:7 calls for a distinction between whether Puritan laws were applied correctly then, and whether they would be applied correctly today. “He who is without [this particular] sin among you, let him cast the first stone” is the principle of “Jury Nullification”: when a law criminalizes what many people do, as Prohibition did, juries simply aren’t going to convict, and the law is in effect nullified. Nor should they convict, as long as they are guilty too. Cont’d
12/1/2008 8:44:49 AM

Biblenut wrote:

Lifting a culture’s laws to higher standards happens as revival heals it. As to whether the Bible is a fit as an ultimate standard of righteousness towards which every culture ought to aspire: church executions for believing “heresy” have no Bible support. Deuteronomy 13 is the closest to this, but notice the trigger is not belief, but SERVING other Gods, which, in O.T. days, demanded actions like child sacrifice which were brutal crimes by God’s standards. Our Supreme Court draws the same line:

Employment Division v. Smith, 494 U.S. 872 (1990), says peyote use can be outlawed even if it is a religious ritual. However, there is no law against believing in the ritual. God criminalizes even inciting to crime, which for our courts is a grey area currently being challenged as terrorists are recruited in the U.S. Sex crimes: many say pedophilia is good for kids: allow it. I dispute the premise. Is God prudish to outlaw sodomy? Besides its unnaturalness, consider the public health threat.

12/1/2008 9:17:57 AM

37 comments so far

Personal to Primewonk1:

[Biblenut](#) wrote:

I just wanted to thank you for your dialog after my oped about when politics and religion were mixed thoroughly. I thought your questions/challenges were brilliant. Of course, I am prejudiced, since they were pretty much the same questions I asked myself as I first stumbled into the subject.

12/14/2008 7:31 AM CST on Des Moines Register

His comment stream:

[http://www.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?](http://www.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?category=PluckPersona&U=778e465d0d824eb9a75b319bfec03c94&plckUserId=778e465d0d824eb9a75b319bfec03c94&plckPersonaPage=PersonaMessages&plckMessageSubmitted=true&plckScrollToAnchor=MessageSubmit&sid=sitelife.desmoinesregister.com#MessageSubmit)

[category=PluckPersona&U=778e465d0d824eb9a75b319bfec03c94&plckUserId=778e465d0d824eb9a75b319bfec03c94&plckPersonaPage=PersonaMessages&plckMessageSubmitted=true&plckScrollToAnchor=MessageSubmit&sid=sitelife.desmoinesregister.com#MessageSubmit](http://www.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?category=PluckPersona&U=778e465d0d824eb9a75b319bfec03c94&plckUserId=778e465d0d824eb9a75b319bfec03c94&plckPersonaPage=PersonaMessages&plckMessageSubmitted=true&plckScrollToAnchor=MessageSubmit&sid=sitelife.desmoinesregister.com#MessageSubmit)

Letter to Editor Responding to My Oped:

Link to article and comment stream:

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20081217/OPINION04/812170335/1038>

December 17, 2008

Losing puritan ideal boosted civil rights

Dave Leach provides a distorted and revisionist portrayal of both the Mayflower Compact and the puritan contribution to our secular form of government ("Religion, Politics Mixed to Give Birth to Freedom," Nov. 28 Iowa View).

First, the Mayflower was formed in opposition to those who wanted freedom from monarchy. This is explained by Plymouth Colony's governor and historian, William Bradford.

In Bradford's "History of Plymouth Plantation" (edited by Franklin Jameson, 1908), Bradford explains that there were some aboard the Mayflower who thought they would be going to an area free from monarchic authority. The Compact was formulated to rein those people in.

Indeed, the Compact describes the signatories as "loyall subjects of our dread sovereigne Lord King James..."

Rather than offering individual rights, the Compact demanded loyalty to the Colony "unto which we promise all due submission and obedience." It is also these Puritans who helped to deprive Native Americans of their land, sustenance and freedom.

Leach tells us that the colonists "enjoyed freedom of religious expression" and then overlooks that it is the Puritans who killed some 20 people at Salem in 1692-93 because they thought them to be "witches" deviating from the Puritan religion. These so-called witches did not have much freedom of speech either.

Our constitutional form of government and our civil liberties advanced precisely because we abandoned the puritan theory of religious governance.

- Hector Avalos, professor, religious studies, Iowa State University, Ames

[MoneyMatters](#) wrote:

Hector is back with his revisionist view of history. In a country of millions of immigrants he points to 20 witches as justification that Puritan beliefs need to be stamped out. He draws a connection between the small and extreme to the reasonable and majority and then concludes we must continue to abandon policies of the majority because of the extreme exceptions.

With his logic we should make abandon gay and lesbian rights because of one Paula Poundstone?

Does he feel that Dukakis was rightfully denied the Oval Office because of one Willie Horton example? Or that Kerry losing was good because of one version of the Swift boat incident?

All Hector has proven is that if you dig deep enough and long enough you can find supporting evidence for ANY point of view. But a fair and scientific method will not produce the same conclusions that he continues to find.

What's next? Kick out a fellow professor who suggests Intelligent Design? Wait, he did that already.
12/17/2008 6:07:29 AM

[shocktheallahs](#) wrote:

Hector is Jan Mickelson's favorite punching bag. Everytime they debate, Jan wastes this guy.
12/17/2008 6:42:52 AM

[whatsleft](#) wrote:

Aw, Hector is such a good GOP!! Loves Intelligent Design and wants us all to go back in time, take away women's right to vote and make slavery legal again. Such a good little GOP and part of the moral majority!
12/17/2008 7:40:51 AM

[Primewonk1](#) wrote:

You guys should look into some of the fun laws these Puritans had when they set up the Massachussets Colony. Worship the wrong version of god - death penalty. Accused of being a witch? Death. Accused of being gay? Death. Rebellious son? Death.

Fun guys.
12/17/2008 1:20:36 PM

Biblenut wrote:

Mr. Avalos confuses Puritans with Separatists. (Pilgrims.) My oped, to which he responds, generated comments that also confused the two. I clarified it in that comment stream, still at <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/article/20081128/OPINION01/811280342/1036/OPINION>. The Compact gave only lip service to the Crown, there being no royal governor to command anything. Landing where their royal charter had no jurisdiction added to the pressure to form some political contract, but their pastor, John Robinson, had written before their voyage that they should create such a document before they left the ship.

The Separatists forced no land from Indians, for the half century when theirs was the dominant church; the Puritans took land without payment from their beginning.

Puritans and Separatists: two theologies, two branches of the same church, both leading to Heaven, I hope, but on Earth, one inspired the freedom we enjoy today, while the other inspired tyranny. Theology matters!

12/18/2008 6:31:19 PM

hiram1 wrote:

What is comical is that if you actually read the Bradford history it does not say what Avalos says it does. It speaks instead of how they were originally bound for Virginia and instead decided to go to New England. Then since a number on ship said that since they were not going to VA that they were bound to no laws. No mention of "monarchic authority". It tells of a long term treaty with the Indians. It tells how an atheist, Mr. Morton, traded with the Indians then drank off the profits corrupting the Indians. He then found he could even do better by selling guns & ammunition and teaching the Indians how to use them. The result was that the Indians then used the guns against the settlers.

12/18/2008 10:42:24 PM

Hiram's page:

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?>

[plckPersonaPage=PersonaMessages&plckUserId=7b655271658a41949878b742325eafe6&U=7b655271658a41949878b742325eafe6&plckScrollToAnchor=MessageSubmit&category=pluckpersona#MessageSubmit](http://www.desmoinesregister.com/apps/pbcs.dll/section?plckPersonaPage=PersonaMessages&plckUserId=7b655271658a41949878b742325eafe6&U=7b655271658a41949878b742325eafe6&plckScrollToAnchor=MessageSubmit&category=pluckpersona#MessageSubmit)

Havalos wrote:

Mr. Hiram1 claims that Bradford does not say what I claim. My argument was that some on the Mayflower thought they were going to a place where they could be free from monarchic authority. I base that on Bradford's own account (W. T. Davis edition, 1908, p. 106), which describes some of these passengers as giving "mutinous speeches." In the English usage of that time, "mutinous" applied to rebellion against the king (See Oxford English Dictionary, sub verbo).

Bradford adds: "That when they came a shore they would use their own libertie; for none had power to command them, the patente they had being for Virginia, and not for New England, which belonged to an other Government, with which the Virginia government had nothing to do."

I interpret "none had power to command them" as comprehensive, and as including the king. This interpretation also explains why the Mayflower Compact's second sentence described the signatories as loyal subjects of the king.

12/23/2008 3:59:48 AM

Havalos wrote:

Hiram1 mentions Mr. [Thomas] Morton in connection with my commentary on the Mayflower Compact. But Mr. Morton's activities are irrelevant to my argument, which does not mention Morton.

In any case, Bradford's account of Morton's activities represent Bradford's viewpoint. Morton had a different view of these Plymouth pilgrims. In his book, *New English Canaan* (1632), Morton reports the murder of Indians by Miles Standish at Wessagussett (now Weymouth, Mass). Standish had invited these Indians to a meal.

Edward Winslow, author of *Good News from New England* (1625) supports Morton's account that this was a premeditated massacre. Winslow also reports that Standish carried the decapitated head of Wituwamat, one of the victims, back to Plymouth. Plymouth colonists did not try Standish for murder. Indians fled their homes in terror after this massacre. Today, when jihadist Muslims parade the heads of their victims, we call them "terrorists."

12/23/2008 4:04:46 AM

Havalos wrote:

Mr. Leach wishes to convince us that the Plymouth group was more tolerant than the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay colony. While Plymouth's ecclesiology might differ from that of Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth's attitudes toward Indians, witches, and heretics was not that different.

1. Indians are referred to as animalistic savages by both groups. The Plymouth group was the first to condone a massacre of Indians (at Wessagussett). The Plymouth group treated Standish as a hero, who had merely inconvenienced them because of this massacre.
2. The treatment of the supposed "atheist" Thomas Morton, who introduced versions of the pagan Maypole celebrations at his Merrymount colony, definitely show intolerance. Bradford (Davis edition, 1908, p. 238) seems to support the persecution of Morton and the destruction of the Maypole.
3. It is doubtful witches would have been more tolerated at Plymouth. It just so happened that no witches (self-declared or accused) lived at Plymouth.

12/23/2008 4:12:52 AM

Havalos wrote:

Mr. Leach appears to make liars out of the signatories of the Mayflower Compact. I pointed out that the Compact, far from renouncing monarchism, has the signatories describing themselves as "loyall subjects" of the king.

Mr. Leach, however, says that they don't mean what they say, and that it was only lip service. Although this may be true, it shows that these Pilgrims were also willing to swear false oaths, which was clearly against biblical law, whether literally or in spirit (see Numbers 30:2, Matthew 5:33).

Even if the Compact does not count as “an oath” by biblical law, the signatories are still knowingly stating something as true that Mr. Leach says they knew was not true. We do call this a “lie.”

12/23/2008 4:18:13 AM

Havalos wrote:

MoneyMatters’ response is logically incoherent. The issue is not whether the beliefs of “majorities” should prevail. My argument was about whether the basic governance theory of the Mayflower group was enshrined in our constitutional government.

The quality of actions matters more sometimes than the quantity of the actions performed by any entity. By MoneyMatters’ logic, Lee Harvey Oswald should not be described as a presidential assassin because, for the vast majority of Oswald’s life, he assassinated no one. So why judge Oswald by only one of thousands of actions Oswald performed?

Intelligent Design, of which MoneyMatters shows no understanding, is even less relevant to my point about the Mayflower group. In any case, I did not “kick out” anyone for believing in intelligent design, and this shows that MoneyMatters has no understanding of university tenure or governance procedures. Otherwise, provide a credible source for your accusation, and I will gladly address it.

12/23/2008 9:40:14

Havalos wrote:

Shocktheallahs is wrong on a number of levels. The term “everytime” suggests that Jan Mickelson and I have debated more than once.

But we have debated formally once, and that was on the issue of gay rights on September 28, 2008. Most of the written evaluations of that debate that I have seen from students indicate that he fared very badly. In particular he refused to answer my questions until he was forced to do so by audience members during the Q&A period.

Shocktheallahs also does not explain why Mr. Mickelson made this statement after the formal part of the debate if Mickelson thought he had “wasted” anyone: “I have no known qualifications to be talking at this level with Hector or anybody else.”

However, if Shocktheallahs has a specific point that he thinks Mr. Mickelson won, then please indicate what that was. You can listen to the entire debate here:

http://cdn2.libsyn.com/mickelson/Debate_2.mp3?nvb=20081219064817&nva=20081220065817&t=0994abb50c2f7477b9223

12/23/2008 9:47:56 AM

Havalos wrote:

The debate over whether the Plymouth group can be classified as “Puritans” (versus “separatists”) has a long history. Bradford (Davis edition, 1908, p. 27) explains that “Puritans” was first used by their opponents: “And to cast contempte the more upon the sincere servants of God, they opprobriously and most injuriously gave unto, and imposed upon them, the name of Puritans...”

If Bradford saw himself as related to these “servants of God,” then Bradford was a “puritan.” John Robinson, however, does distinguish his group from the Puritans (and from Protestants!), according to a quote in Alexander Drysdale’s History of English Presbyterianism (1889, p. 5, note).

I don’t see this as an either-or issue. There were separatist Puritans and non-separatist Puritans. The Oxford English Dictionary (sub verbo) says Puritans “often applied to any who separated from the established church.” See Ann Hughes, “Anglo-American Puritanisms,” Journal of British History 39 (January 2000):1-7.

12/23/2008 10:35:45 AM

Biblenut wrote:

RE: Avalos & freedom from the King: I think it was bondservants thinking they might be free from their debts, not freemen thinking they might be free from the King, when the ship landed outside the area chartered by the King, which became a new reason for the Compact. I hope Mr. Avalos does not mean by his verbiage that they anticipated this before they landed. Whatever they thought, it was not THE reason for the compact, since their pastor back home had advised them to create it before landing.

The “massacre”: At Plimoth Plantation in September, I videoed Pilgrim reenactors describing the event from “their” perspective, then the genuine Wampanoag descendants telling their version. Amazing to hear the different versions as if, even after 400 years, and even though the same original sources are available to both sides, and even though the reenactors and the descendants get their checks from the same pay window, they STILL don’t seem to have talked to each other about it! (Cont’d)

12/23/2008 2:10:04 PM

Biblenut wrote:

They STILL conveniently leave out details not favorable to their prejudice, requiring me to go back and forth between them before they will admit them all! As bad as Democrats and Republicans today!

The version that emerged for me was that an enemy chief, also an enemy of the Wampanoag, was making terrorist-grade threats. Standish and a handful of others went to his village. Surrounded by a crowd of natives, the chief showed Standish his large knife. He said one side of it was carved with the name of his last victim, a Dutchman, and that soon the other side would be carved with Standish’s name. Standish quickly took the knife out of his hand and stabbed him in the stomach with it. Then, still surrounded by those natives who had just acquired new respect for him, he sliced off the chief’s head and carried it back to Plimoth and mounted it on a pike. Nothing was said to me about more than the one native killed. Could that be a different incident?

12/23/2008 2:16:22 PM

Biblenut wrote:

The Maypole incident invites extended debate. But remember even our own Supreme Court distinguishes between freedom of religious belief, and freedom of religious actions which are defined by the laws of the land as crimes. As to belief, the fact is only half the Pilgrims were Separatists. The other half were Church of England members or no members at all, but they still had an equal voice in their government.

We're getting silly over whether the "loyall subjects" of the king were lying about their loyalty. These 1,000 character limits justify latitude. I said their loyalty was "lip service" in the sense that as a practical matter, the king had no representative there to require anything. They still faithfully fulfilled their financial obligations to their investors, and relied for their existence on future shipments. There was actually a royal governor over them, but he never got to the New World. In their government, no king prevented them from their experiment in Freedom.

12/23/2008 2:25:36 PM

Biblenut wrote:

Your case for calling the Separatists "Puritans" is unpersuasive on its face. Your own facts argue against your conclusion. You say Governor Bradford called the Puritan label an insult, which should settle it. You say Bradford was a Puritan "If Bradford saw himself as related to these 'servants of God,'" without suggesting any reason to think he did. Your dictionary quote seems too general to resolve this matter, leaving undefined the limits of "often" and of "established church".

But even if a case can be made that the Puritan label is not just plain wrong, but can in some circumstances not be misleading, you make it misleading by your context of the crimes of the "OTHER Puritans", the ones at Salem.

I really appreciate your dialog. I savor the Mind Meat. I want to understand our heritage far better than I do, so I appreciate these double checks on what I have been told. Although I will defend the facts as well as I know them, I won't mind at all learning where I err.

12/23/2008 2:38:09 PM

Havalos wrote:

Mr. Leach says: "Your dictionary quote seems too general to resolve this matter, leaving undefined the limits of "often" and of "established church".

I provided specific references so that you can see the rest of the context because the space here does not allow extensive quotations.

But, the Oxford English Dictionary documents, with specific quotations and dates, the history of "Puritan" very well from the 1500s to modern times. The OED adds "Originally it was applied to those within the Church of England who demanded further reformation, especially in the direction of Presbyterianism; afterwards, naturally to the same party when they were separated from the Church, and became the anti-episcopal Presbyterians, Independents, or Baptists...In later times the term has become historical without any opprobrious connotation..." So it is clear that the OED is speaking about separatists from the Church of England.

12/24/2008 4:29:14 AM

Havalos wrote:

The fact that “Puritans” was first used as an insult does not mean that scholars cannot use that term for Bradford’s group.

Most rubrics used in modern scholarship are conventions that were probably not used by those to whom they are first applied. For example, you use the term “Indians” even though this was not a term first used by the indigenous people of this continent. The term “Protestant” was also used first as an insult, but this does not prevent us from using it. Robinson seems to distinguish himself from “Protestants,” but we still would classify him that way.

Bradford may not have liked the word “Puritan” but he does indicate that he shares the beliefs and practices of those to whom the word was applied by their opponents, and this included those “who would not submit to their ceremonies, and become slaves to them and their popish trash.” Thus, he would be included under the term “puritan” by opponents (Davis edition, 1908, p. 27).

12/24/2008 4:37:29 AM

Havalos wrote:

I am not confusing the non-separatist Salem Puritans with the separatist Plymouth Puritans. I am simply using a common scholarly convention that sees both groups as Puritans because they sought to purify the church from the vestiges of Catholicism.

Bradford himself uses the term “purity” when describing why the groups to which he belongs were persecuted. Note his statement: “Satan hath raised...and continued against the saints... and the churches of God revert to their ancient puritie and recover their primitive order, libertie, and bewtie” (Davis edition, 1908, p. 23).

But what I am alleging is that the Salem and Plymouth groups are both willing to persecute those who do not share their religious beliefs and practices. They have a common approach to the native populations (e.g., as savages who can be killed and terrorized). Therefore, neither group can be seen as a model for our constitutional form of government or as advocates of individual religious liberty.

12/24/2008 4:39:59 AM

Havalos wrote:

Mr. Leach says: “Standish quickly took the knife out of his hand and stabbed him in the stomach with it.” Mr. Leach, as usual, provides no specific sources or page numbers for this claim.

One of my sources is Edward Winslow, a leader of the Plymouth colony and author of “Good News From New England (1625). First, the incident where Pecksuot (the first Indian killed in the massacre) displayed his knife happened the DAY BEFORE the massacre. Mr. Leach gives the impression that this incident was immediately preceding Standish’s actions.

Second, Winslow says concerning Standish: “and snatching [Pecksuot’s] own knife from his neck, though with much struggling, killed him therewith.” In other words, Pecksuot DID NOT have a knife in his hand. The knife was hanging on Pecksuot's neck. It was clearly a cold-blooded and premeditated murder, and not an act of self-defense, by Standish.

Source: N. and T. Philbrick, editors, *The Mayflower Papers* (Penguin edition, 2007), pp. 151-53.

12/24/2008 4:46:27 AM

Havalos wrote:

Mr. Leach says: “Nothing was said to me about more than the one native killed.”

But, Edward Winslow’s account enumerates the killing of at least 5-6 Indians in this series of events, and also the abduction of Indian women by the Plymouth group.

Mr. Leach also is not reading Bradford’s history very carefully here. Bradford’s account (Davis edition, 1908, pp. 172-173) bears a copy of a letter (dated December 19, 1623) from Robinson about this event. Robinson refers to “the killing of those poor Indians...” Thus, even Robinson knew that there was MORE THAN ONE Indian killed.

Thus, the Plymouth group, not the Mass Bay Puritans, was the first to condone the killing of Indians, many of whom subsequently fled their neighboring lands because of the Plymouth group’s terrorist practices. Note that even Robinson alludes to Christians who are “a terrour to poor barbarous people.” Thus, the Plymouth group did help to dispossess native Americans of their land and liberty.

12/24/2008 4:50:43 AM

Biblenut wrote:

Thank you for your evidence for calling the Separatists "Puritans". I'll try to get used to its acceptability as a general term. Yes, "Puritan" is the right term for the argument that there is no moral difference between the two.

Do you mean the Separatists thought of the natives as "savages who can be killed and terrorized" PER SE? For amusement? Not just when they declare war? As I said, my source was talking with the historians at Plimoth Plantation. I appreciate your details. At least your account agrees the Separatists attacked only after the natives declared war. And if only 6 natives were slain after that, that seems like minimal loss of life!

If enough were slain to justify the word "massacre", how does that disqualify the Separatist freedom from being "a model for our constitutional form of government or as advocates of individual religious liberty"? We still disagree whether our wars are just, but we still have a constitution and we don't terrorize atheists.

12/24/2008 1:11:58 PM