

# The Separation of Church and State

by Ralph A. Raimi

**M**y father, Jacob, arrived in this country as an immigrant in 1923. He would have come here earlier, but was drafted for service in the Polish army in 1919 and, under the banner of Marshal Pilsudski, helped fight Poland's successful war against Trotsky and the Communists. In America he joined his wife and son, who had preceded him. He settled in Detroit and opened a dry-goods store, begot two more sons (myself the middle of the three), thrived, and prospered. He died last summer, at the age of 92 years, the seventh after the death of his faithful wife.

Fighting for Poland did not particularly please my father, since as a Jew in Nasielsk, a small town near Warsaw, he was never truly at home. The distinction between Jew and non-Jew in the Poland of the Russian Empire was in most ways more strict than the distinction between Negro and white in the American South in, say, the period 1890-1915. It had been a newly virulent sequence of pogroms, murderous mob attacks on Jews and their goods and houses, that had generated the great emigration of Polish (and other) Jews to America at that time. Jews feared Eastertide in particular, a time when provincial priests often preached the guilt of the Jews, and even fostered the libel, widely believed among the Polish and Russian peasants, that Jews used the blood of murdered Christian children in the making of matzos for the Passover.

But with the fall of the czar and the liberation of Poland one might hope for better times, even for Jews. My emigrating father left his own father and mother in a new Polish Republic, reborn with

his help and with that hope. The worst excesses of Polish anti-Semitism did in fact diminish after the war, and in the end—20 years later—it was the Nazis, not the Poles, who murdered those of his family that did not follow him to America.

At my father's death last year I collected some of his personal papers and among them found his Certificate of Naturalization, given in the U.S. District Court of the Eastern District of Michigan. It concludes, "IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF the seal of said court is hereunto affixed on the ninth day of July in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and twenty-eight, and of our Independence the one hundred and fifty-third."

The "year of our Lord" 1928? Much evil had been done, in the name of that Lord, to my father and his family in Nasielsk. Too, anno Domini 1928 was equivalent to the year 5688 in the Hebrew calendar, which counts, instead of the years since Christ, the years since Creation, the work of an earlier Lord. Was not the language of the United States Court for the Eastern District of Michigan a bit ethnocentric? Insensitive? Did not my father feel left out of things, with his citizenship dated according to a Christian tradition with its casual assertion that "our" Lord was Jesus?

I must say that he did not. He never ceased to bless the United States of America, from the day of his arrival to the day of his death.

He loved even the police because he knew the nightstick was not intended for him, but for those who might want to harm him. In Nasielsk, he told me, the sight of a policeman would induce him to cross to the other side of the street and pass at a distance—why take a chance? Here in America, on the other hand, he would sometimes get a call

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in the middle of the night from a policeman telling him that he had left a door unlocked in his store. “Best come round, sir, and lock it up properly,” the cop might say. “Sir”? To a Jew? It was a miracle, America.

I never asked my father what he thought about the separation of church and state. It was not a question. They were separate here; he knew that, and he also knew the Constitution required it so. Everyone could attend the church of his choice, or no church at all, and at school nobody asked the religion of his children, either.

But Christmas was a legal holiday; what about that? We sang Christmas carols at school; what about that? I might have asked him these questions, but I never did, for it would never have occurred to him that these things constituted “an establishment of religion.” They were merely an American tradition. We were in a country that had been founded by Christians, a country whose Constitution owed its structure to English philosophers, all of them Christians; why shouldn’t the echoes of these origins remain in our public documents? There is a difference, after all, between a Christian sentiment and a pogrom.

My father knew all this. In America we speak a language whose origin was in England, and we follow a law whose origin was in England. Our very liberties, won “from” England in 1776, had their origins in England nonetheless; there was nothing like them in Russia either before or after their Revolution. That the year of my father’s citizenship should be styled “anno Domini” 1928 did not make it for him any less blessed a year, or restrict its boon to Christians alone.

Even so, I’m glad the Certificate of Naturalization also included that other, more secular date, “and [in the year] of our Independence the one hundred and fifty-third,” for my father (and I) owed a great deal to those who secured our inde-

pendence, as the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights has recently reminded us. But the Founders, who insisted in the First Amendment that Congress should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, had no intention of making religion, or its milder echoes in our public observances, downright illegal. They knew as well as we that 1776, watershed though it was, was still not The Beginning. Unlike the French Jacobins who declared the date of their ill-fated revolution to be Year 1, our American forebears saw danger in rejecting all tradition, and they were right.

American Jews in 1791 were as free as Christians, and they still are, nor does their liberty suffer from an occasional Christian reference, whether in a prayer at the opening of Congress or in a carol sung at school. It is not words that tyrannize, after all, but evil intention. Communist Russia for 70 years oppressed all religion and practically forbade all public religious expression. Nineteen Seventeen was Year 1 for their new order; Lenin be praised! Did that make their Jews—or anyone else—free? Secure? At home?

I intend to have my father’s and my mother’s naturalization papers framed for the wall of my study. I am proud of those documents, or, more accurately, grateful. My parents came to America so that I might be free. I will point this out to visitors. It might be that some of them, infected by American Civil Liberties Union propaganda, will be horrified by that impermissible Christian reference, “in the year of our Lord,” printed right there on a United States Federal Court document. If so, I will explain:

“Well, it’s not exactly *my* Lord they’re talking about, sure, but that’s the way they said it in 1928. Maybe they still do. My father never saw any harm in it. ‘Establishment of religion?’ Don’t make me laugh.” □

## George Washington on Religious Toleration

**I**t is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it was by the indulgence of one class of the people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that those who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it, on all occasions, their effectual support.

—A letter to the congregation of Touro Synagogue,  
Newport, Rhode Island, 1790

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# Freedom of Education Will Solve Our Education Crisis

by Jack D. Douglas

**M**ost Americans have always been passionately devoted to education. The current national panic over our plummeting learning scores is only the latest sign of this devotion and is remarkably similar to the panics over purported education crises that have occurred throughout U.S. history.

Unfortunately, almost all of the politicians and so-called expert educationalists rushing forward to solve this latest education crisis seem to have forgotten the simplest facts about the early history of American education, which enabled this country to produce far more than its share of the world's most creative thinkers. This ignorant panic is inspiring a headlong rush into the central planning and bureaucratization of education that have been increasingly destroying the effectiveness of U.S. education for over 40 years.

The founders of the new American colonies were completely convinced that individual learning was the way to self-improvement of all forms. That faith in individual learning was most intense among the Puritans of New England and was a direct result of their passionate religious faith. The Puritans knew from their experience that control of education was the foundation of the church bureaucracy's tyranny over individual hearts and minds. They believed that each individual must be

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able to read the Bible in his native language so that the bureaucratic experts of the church could not assert themselves as the powerful intermediaries between Christians and their omnipotent God as revealed in ancient tongues read only by the bureaucrats. They knew that real learning—individual knowledge and thought free of the church's control—was the first prerequisite of freedom from the tyranny of bureaucracy.

As soon as they had overcome their immediate anxieties about starvation and disease, those devotees of individual education founded what is now Harvard College (in 1636) to ensure a steady supply of educated young men for their growing colony. By the time of the Revolution, that devotion to education had supplied the American people with a remarkable community of scholars and scientists who led them in creating "The First New Nation." The Founding Fathers of our constitutional democracy were probably the most brilliant, creative, and knowledgeable group of leaders in human history. They certainly vastly surpassed the politicians who now press upon us a miasma of bureaucratic solutions to our education crisis.

## Individual Education

The great accomplishments of American scholarship and science in the nation's first three centuries were not the result of great wealth, huge government expenditures, massive centers of formal education, or expert theories of learning. Learning was overwhelmingly a simple, difficult,