

DEBUNKED!

Five Religious Right Myths About Separation of Church and State

1 *Separation of church and state is not in the Constitution.* This would come as a surprise to James Madison, the “father of the Constitution” and author of the First Amendment. Madison once observed, “Strongly guarded ... is the separation between religion and government in the Constitution of the United States.” Madison’s First Amendment forbids any law “respecting an establishment of religion” while protecting faith’s “free exercise.” This is the genesis of separation of church and state.

2 *The United States was founded to be a “Christian nation.”* Not according to the Founders, it wasn’t. The Constitution does not single out Christianity for preferential treatment. In fact, the Constitution contains no references to the Christian religion, Jesus Christ, or even God in the body of the document. It is a secular document for a nation with a secular government.

3 *The American people do not support separation of church and state.* Many polls show that Americans support and cherish the separation of church and state. A 2004 poll, for example, found that 78 percent of Americans agreed that maintaining separation of church and state is important. Americans realize that the separation principle is the foundation upon which religious freedom rests.

4 *American religious leaders oppose separation of church and state.* Only a narrow segment of ultra-conservative clergy oppose church-state separation. Most of America’s religious leaders realize that church-state has permitted faith to flourish in America. They are aware that nations without separation are either repressive theocracies (Iran) or have neutered state churches (England).

5 *Separation of church and state is hostile to religion.* Far from it. Church-state separation keeps the government from meddling in internal church affairs and protects the right of all Americans to believe (or not believe) as they see fit. Far from being hostile toward religion, this policy protects it.