

PRESIDENTIAL RESPONSES TO FAITH COMMUNITIES, 1790-1802

The Hebrew Congregation to President George Washington, 17 August 1790

Permit the children of the Stock of Abraham to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person & merits—and to join with our fellow Citizens in welcoming you to New Port.

With pleasure we reflect on those days—those days of difficulty, & danger when the God of Israel, who delivered David from the peril of the sword, shielded your head in the day of battle: and we rejoice to think, that the same Spirit who rested in the Bosom of the greatly beloved Daniel enabling him to preside over the Provinces of the Babylonish Empire, rests and ever will rest upon you, enabling you to discharge the arduous duties of Chief Magistrate in these States.

Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events) behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People—a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance—but generously affording to All liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship: deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language, equal parts of the great governmental Machine: This so ample and extensive Federal Union whose basis is Philanthropy, Mutual Confidence and Publick Virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the Great God, who ruleth in the Armies Of Heaven and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, doing whatever seemeth him good.

For all the Blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal and benign administration, we desire to send up our thanks to the Antient of Days, the great preserver of Men—beseeching him, that the Angel who conducted our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised land, may graciously conduct you through all the difficulties and dangers of this mortal life: and, when like Joshua full of days and full of honour, you are gathered to your Fathers, may you be admitted into the Heavenly Paradise to partake of the water of life, and the tree of immortality.

Cite as: *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008.
Original source: Presidential Series (24 September 1788–3 March 1796 [in progress]), Volume 6

President George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, 18 August 1790

Gentlemen.

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of 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 they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

Go: Washington

Cite as: The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008.
Original source: Presidential Series (24 September 1788–3 March 1796 [in progress]), Volume 6

The Maryland General Assembly to President John Adams, 15 December 1798 (excerpts)

Sir

Called to the Presidency of the General Government, at a moment when the aspiring and venal rulers of France convulsed all Europe with a war prosecuted for plunder and aggrandisement, it was not difficult to foresee, that every species of artifice and intrigue, which talents could suggest, ambition excite, or avarice inflame, would be employed to disturb our happiness and peace, to cajole or force our Country into a war Prejudicial to our interests, and to render your administration painful, perplexing, and, if possible, odious to the people;

The destruction of religion, and encouragement of loose principles, were eminently calculated to create fit instruments for promoting divisions in, and paralyzing the energies of other Governments: hence the unremitting, dark and insidious exertions, practised to divide us at home, whilst a lawless, vexatious, and predatory war plundered us abroad. . . .

Having emancipated ourselves from Britain, and secured our liberties by one revolution we pledge ourselves not to sacrifice the blessings of Freedom at the shrine of France, and we will stand prepared to encounter her open hostilities, or counteract her yet more dangerous principles and intrigues; nor will we suffer ourselves to be lulled into a fatal security by the semblance of conciliatory language or measures, the result of insidious policy. We will support the Government of our choice, preserve our Independence and our rights, or perish in the attempt. But we fondly trust, that so long as the enjoyment of national liberty is secured, virtue and religion inculcated and practised, while the Government continues true to the people, and the people to themselves, we may defy the assaults of any power on earth, and look forward, under the protection of Heaven, to a continuance of the prosperity and happiness of our Country. . . .

Cite as: Maryland House Journals, Votes and Proceedings of the House, November Session, 1798.

President John Adams to Maryland General Assembly, 23 December 1798 (excerpts)

Gentlemen

An eloquent Address adopted by the two Houses of the General Assembly of Maryland . . . has been presented to me by Mr Howard one of your Senators in Congress. . . .

What Shall I Say to you, Gentlemen on the subject of the Destruction of Religion and Encouragement of loose Principles? I am not fond of introducing this Sacred Topic into political disquisitions. But Religion is the Basis of moral obligation; of the Essence of all Government; the only Ground of Confidence between Man and Man; and the foundation of all society. Without it, the World would be an Universal and perpetual War of Artifice Intrigue, fraud stratagem and Violence of all Men against all Men. This at least is my opinion, though I shall not persecute those who differ from me. When Religious Liberty has been asserted, by invincible Arguments of the soundest Divines as well as the Phylosophers of this Century and the last: When every Engine of Wit satyr, Humour and Ridicule have been employed to discountenance Intolerance, is the whole to terminate in a cruel and Sanguinary Persecution of all Religion? In the Annihilation of all the Sacred foundations of Morality Government and Society?—America will not, I trust, be willing to be converted into a perfect Bedlam, whatever other Part of the World may wish it.

Cite As: The Papers of John Adams: Documents 1787–1826, Founders Early Access.

The Danbury Baptist Association to President Thomas Jefferson, post 7 October 1801

Sir,

Among the many millions in America and Europe who rejoice in your Election to office; we embrace the first opportunity which we have enjoy'd in our collective capacity, since your Inauguration, to express our great satisfaction, in your appointment to the chief Magistracy in the United States: And though our mode of expression may be less courtly and pompous than what many others clothe their addresses with, we beg you, Sir to believe, that none are more sincere.

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 neighbour*. But Sir, our constitution of government is not specific. Our antient charter, together with the Laws made coincident therewith, were adopted as the Basis of our government, At the time of our revolution; and such had been our Laws & usages, & such still are; that religion is consider'd as the first object of Legislation; & 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 expence of such degrading acknowledgements as are inconsistent with the rights of freemen. It is not to be wondred at therefore; if those, who seek after *power & gain* under the pretence *of government & Religion* should reproach their fellow men—should reproach their chief Magistrate, as an enemy of religion Law & good order because he will not, dares not assume the prerogative of Jehovah and make Laws to govern the Kingdom of Christ.

Sir, we are sensible that the President of the united States, is not the national Legislator, & also sensible that the national government cannot destroy the Laws of each State; but our hopes are strong that the sentiments of our beloved President, which have had such genial Effect already, like the radiant beams of the Sun, will shine & prevail through all these States and all the world till Hierarchy and tyranny be destroyed from the Earth. Sir when we reflect on your past services, and see a glow of philanthropy and good will shining forth in a course of more than thirty years we have reason to believe that America's God has raised you up to fill the chair of State out of that good will which he bears to the Millions which you preside over. May God strengthen you for the arduous task which providence & the voice of the people have cal'd you to sustain and support you in your Administration against all the predetermin'd opposition of those who wish to rise to wealth & importance on the poverty and subjection of the people

And may the Lord preserve you safe from every evil and bring you at last to his Heavenly Kingdom throug Jesus Christ our Glorious Mediator.

Signed in behalf of the Association

NEHH. DODGE
EPHM. ROBBINS
STEPHEN S NELSON

Cite as: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, ed. James P. McClure and J. Jefferson Looney. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008–2018. Original source: Main Series, Volume 35

President Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Association, 1 January 1802

GENTLEMEN

The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist association, give me the highest satisfaction. my duties dictate a faithful & zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, & in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing.

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that *their* legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection & blessing of the common father and creator of man, and tender you for yourselves & your religious association, assurances of my high respect & esteem.

TH: JEFFERSON

Cite as: The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition, ed. James P. McClure and J. Jefferson Looney. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008–2018. Original source: Main Series, Volume 36