

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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June 22, 2023

SENT VIA FAX AND U.S. MAIL: (212) 406-3587

The Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor of New York City
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Ongoing and unrelenting hostility to the core principle of separation between state and church

Dear Mayor Adams:

We are writing once again on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and our New York City membership to object to your continued attacks on the core principle of separation between state and church. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 largely nonreligious members across the country, including more than 2,000 members in New York. FFRF works to defend the constitutional separation between state and church and to educate about nontheism.

We have written to you in the past regarding your denigration of the constitutional principle of separation between church and state and the use of your position to advance your personal religious beliefs. We expressed our concern that you said “the mayor of New York is a servant of God,” rather than of the people. You also dissed the separation of church and state at length, and blamed gun violence in schools on secular education (e.g., court rulings protecting a captive audience of students of diverse religions and no religion from being subjected to prayer and religious rituals).

We are sorry to see you reaffirm your anti-constitutional belief that you should infuse your personal religious beliefs with your secular position as mayor, as expressed at a church service on Father’s Day, June 18, when you spoke at Lenox Road Baptist Church.

The pastor announced that “the 110th Mayor of the great city of New York is worshiping with us.” During your remarks you complained about the backlash regarding your statements denigrating the separation of church and state and unabashedly pushing your religion:

...And I started to say, don't tell me about separation of church and state...Don't tell me that when you took prayer out of school, guns came in. Don't tell me that I have to remove my feeling of God. And you saw what happened! You saw all the front pages and the national stories, you know, how dare the most powerful mayor on the globe start talking about God! Because I don't care what anyone says, it's time to pray.

You also stated:

Thirty-something years ago, I woke up out of my sleep in a cold sweat. God spoke to my heart and said, 'you are going to be the mayor January 1, 2022.' And the message was clear. God stated, 'you cannot be silent, you must tell everyone you know...I would go around the city, pastor, and I would tell everybody 'I'm gonna be mayor January 1, 2022.' People used to think I was on medication.

You concluded your remarks by criticizing press coverage of you and your administration, comparing yourself to Denzel Washington's character in the 1989 Civil War film "Glory," when he is set to be whipped for leaving his squadron to spend time with his love interest. You alluded to the scars from previous whippings as representing how critical press coverage cannot hurt or deter you from your "Godly mission."

Mayor Adams, your continued promotion of your personal religious beliefs and denigration of secularism is distasteful and appalling. As we previously noted, you are free to worship as you like as a private individual.

But you gave a guest sermon where you were introduced as mayor, then used that religious podium to double-down on attacking those who have urged you to not to misuse your secular office to promote your religious beliefs and deride the First Amendment. You took an oath of office "to support and defend" the U.S. Constitution, which is an entirely godless and secular document. Your duty as an elected official is to the Constitution and the people it protects.

Your continued use of the perks of your public office to promote your personal religious beliefs is an abuse of public trust as mayor of America's largest city. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages. The Supreme Court has said time and again that the "First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary Cty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947).

Once again we remind you that as mayor, your duty is to support the U.S. Constitution, including its Establishment Clause separating religion from government, and to protect the rights of conscience of **all** New Yorkers regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs. In the face of an active campaign by white Christian nationalists to declare the United States a Christian nation, and undo many First Amendment protections as well as other civil liberties, we consider your statements unAmerican. Please refrain in future from using your mayoral position to promote your personal religion, put down nonbelief and denigrate constitutional protections.

Very truly,

Handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Annie Laurie Gaylor Dan Barker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-presidents
ALG/DB:cal