

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 › MADISON, WI 53701 › (608) 256-8900 › WWW.FFRF.ORG

March 5, 2024

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [press@politico.com](mailto:press@politico.com)**

Goli Sheikholeslami, CEO  
John F. Harris, Editor-in-Chief  
Politico  
1000 Wilson Blvd, 8th Floor  
Arlington, VA 22209

Re: Letter from Christian nationalists supporting Christian nationalism

Dear Mr. Harris and Ms. Sheikholeslami,

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to commend Heidi Przybyla's accurate reportage of the dangers of Christian nationalism and to correct the blatant misinformation included in a letter you recently received from Tony Perkins and Brian Burch. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council and Brian Burch of Catholic Vote sent you a letter on Wednesday where they “slammed Politico national investigative correspondent Heidi Przybyla's ‘disqualifying lack of knowledge of the United States of America’s founding documents and a profoundly prejudicial view toward American religious groups.’”<sup>1</sup>

In the letter, they claim that “our own Republic was founded on the belief that our rights come from God, not earthly kings or government” which is “clearly articulated in the Declaration of Independence” because it mentions that all men are “endowed by their Creator.” They then claim that “it has been reiterated and embraced by every President of the United States since George Washington.” There are no citations provided, or evidence to back up these assertions.

They claim that Ms. Przybyla was “manifestly trying to demonize the Christian community and sow fear through propaganda.” They then ludicrously imply that her comments on the very real dangers of Christian nationalism are connected to violence against places of worship, including “attacks on the Jewish community.”

We write to commend Ms. Przybyla's excellent coverage of Christian nationalism and to ensure that Politico continues to cover this extreme threat to democracy. This letter, like most

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.foxnews.com/media/christian-groups-send-letter-politico-demanding-apology-reporters-comments?intcmp=tw\\_fnc](https://www.foxnews.com/media/christian-groups-send-letter-politico-demanding-apology-reporters-comments?intcmp=tw_fnc)

disinformation spread by Christian nationalists, is a blatant attempt to rewrite our nation's history to claim we were Christian. The letter is intended to goad you into reducing coverage of Christian nationalism, lest you be condemned as attacking Christianity, which Ms. Przybyla correctly explained is different from Christian nationalism.

Contrary to the assertions in the letter that “our rights come from God,” the United States was founded by Enlightenment-inspired thinkers who valued reason and skepticism. If the Framers had wanted to establish the U.S. based on Christian principles, they would have said so in the Constitution, the founding document of our nation. Instead they did the opposite. Our Founders made the United States the first among nations to adopt a godless and entirely secular Constitution, one that invested sovereignty not in a divinity but in “We the People” and whose only references to religion are exclusionary (e.g., Article VI’s prohibition of any religious test as a qualification for public office).<sup>2</sup>

In reality, many of the Founders were particularly wary of forming a country that commingled religion with government. That is why they drafted a Constitution that effectively formed “a wall of separation between church and state.” This is perfectly exemplified in George Washington’s response to a letter from Presbyterian Ministers in Massachusetts and New Hampshire expressing their disappointment in the absence of “some Explicit acknowledgement of the only true God and Jesus Christ” in the Constitution. Washington replied “that the path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction. To this consideration we ought to ascribe the absence of any regulation, respecting religion, from the [Constitution] of our country.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1791, America famously signed a treaty with Tripoli declaring that the “government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.” This treaty—drafted during George Washington’s presidency, approved unanimously by the Senate, and signed by John Adams—is a reminder that the Founders explicitly held out the United States as a government that separated state from church. It is pure misinformation to suggest that our nation is founded on biblical principles. The Bill of Rights was adopted the same year, with its First Amendment barring any religious establishment of religion by government and protecting rights of conscience.

The letter is nothing more than a blatant attempt to pressure news organizations to stop reporting on Christian nationalism. It also perpetuates the myth that America is a Christian nation by citing one phrase from the Declaration of Independence. In reality, every reference to religion in the U.S. Constitution, the document on which our government is based, is exclusionary, including prohibitions on religious tests for public office, implicitly in the godless oath of office prescribed for the presidency and later, in the First Amendment’s historic bar of any congressional establishment of religion (a bar extended to state governments under the 14th Amendment). The United States was first among nations to invest sovereignty not in a deity, but in “We the People.” The proscription against religion in government has served our nation well, with the U.S. Constitution now the longest living constitution in history, and our nation spared the constant religious wars afflicting theocratic regions around the world. Keeping religion out of

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. CONST. art. VI, § 3.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from George Washington to Presbyterian Ministers of Massachusetts and New Hampshire (Nov. 2, 1789).

government has in fact allowed religion to flourish on our continent, because it protects freedom of conscience. Keeping divisive religion out of the government is a fundamental American ideal, is essential for true religious freedom, and has been a tremendous asset to our society. This is a principle to revere, not tarnish or destroy.

Ms. Pryzbyla and Politico do not owe an apology to anyone and should continue covering Christian nationalism, the greatest current threat to our democracy.

Very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of two names: "Annie Laurie Gaylor" and "Dan Barker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker  
Co-Presidents