

**The Religion of Thomas Jefferson,  
Author of the Declaration of Independence.  
Excerpted from, *The Rewriting of America's History*,  
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Thomas Jefferson has been called numerous things, including atheist, deist, devil and/or agnostic. None of these titles is accurate, according to original writings and to his own description of himself and what he stood for.

According to Noah Webster's definition in his original 1854 Dictionary, a "deist" was:

One who believes in the existence of a God, but denies revealed religion; one who professes no form of religion, but follows the light of nature and reason, as his only guides in doctrine and practice; a free-thinker.

However, the following quotations from Jefferson's own writings belie the fact. Few people are aware of Jefferson's *Prayer for Peace*, as it is called. Excerpted from his Second Inaugural Address, it was delivered on March 4, 1805, as follows:

I shall now enter on the duties to which my fellow-citizens have again called me, and shall proceed in the spirit of those principles which they have approved....I shall need, therefore, all the indulgence I have heretofore experienced...I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our forefathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life, who has covered our infancy with His Providence and our riper years with His wisdom and power, and to whose goodness I ask you to join with me in supplications that He will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their councils and prosper their measures, that whatever they do shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendship and approbation of all nations.

Jefferson, like James Madison, was a man ahead of his times, one able to learn from the mistakes of history, even though such action made him unpopular with the ecclesiastical order of religious leaders who were part of the established church.

*The Statute for Religious Freedom*, which Jefferson considered one of his greatest contributions to the nation, was a bill written in reaction to one proposed in 1785, the establishment of Religion by Law. Had this bill been passed, all citizens of Virginia would have been taxed to support the clergy. As Jefferson wrote in his autobiography, we see that the issue was hotly debated for five years. From Jefferson's autobiography we read his own description of the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Virginia:

But our opponents carried, in the General Resolutions of the Committee

of November 19, a declaration that Religious assemblies ought to be regulated and that provision ought to be made for continuing the succession of the clergy and superintending their conduct. And in the bill now passed was inserted an express reservation of the question whether a general assessment should not be established by law on everyone to the support of the pastor of his choice; or whether all should be left to voluntary contributions; and on this question, debated at every session from '76 to '79 (come of our dissenting allies, having now secured their particular object, going over to the advocates of a general assessment), we could only obtain a suspension from session to session until '79 when the question against a general assessment was finally carried and the establishment of the Anglican Church entirely put down.

Today, many who label Jefferson a deist, and/or anti-Christian, have likely based their conclusions upon a faulty understanding of this controversial issue of that time, which directly concerned the church. He was misrepresented and maligned by the clergy of his day, who were not able to grasp the long-range effects of the bill they favored. Jefferson understood, and history has proved him right, that true Christianity would prosper without the aid of civil government. He stood for what he believed, in spite of severe opposition and misunderstanding of his own character. James Madison's arduous efforts worked hand-in-hand with Jefferson's towards the attainment of religious freedom. (See Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance* in the Addendum.)

### **Thomas Jefferson's Library**

Thomas Jefferson's library included many volumes on religion. There are 190 entries under the title "Religion," 187 of these pertaining to Christianity, while the remaining three are as follows:

An Historical Account of the Heathen gods and heroes necessary for understanding of the ancient poets. 1722.  
Boyse's Pantheon History of Heathen gods, for those who would understanding History, Poetry, Painting, statuary, Medals, coins, etc. 1753. And one copy of Sale's Koran, 1764.

Among Jefferson's entries on religion are innumerable Bibles – Greek, Latin, French and English versions; the *Septuagint* (Greek Old Testament); the Apocrypha; The Holy Bible – Old and New Testaments, translated out of the original tongues, and with the former translations diligently compared and revised, 1804.

On the title page of this catalogue Jefferson's famous words are quoted: "...I am for freedom of Religion, and against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another...."

Form these words we see Jefferson's abhorrence of a legally established state church, dictating to, and controlling other Christian denominations at will. This he denounces and calls "priestcraft."

Jefferson's well-worn, beautifully leatherbound, four-volume personal Bible holds preeminence in this collection. Its entry describes Jefferson's Bible as:

Bible. English. 1808.

Thomson

The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Covenant, commonly called the Old and New Testament

Translated from the Greek by Charles Thomason, late Secretary to the Congress of the United States.

Philadelphia. Printed by J. Aitken, 1808. The Bible on which Dr. Daniel Boorstin took the oath of office as the 12<sup>th</sup> Librarian of Congress, November 12, 1975.

Other entries in the collection include:

Old and New Testament and Apocrypha 1798.

Greek New Testament 1583.

Greek and Latin New Testament 1578.

Latin New Testament 1735.

Bible – New Testament Greek 1800.

Hammond's New Testament – A Paraphrase and Annotation upon all the Books of the New Testament, briefly explaining all the difficult places therein.

The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, translated out of the original Greek, 1802.

The History of Jesus by Thompson and Price, 1805.

The History of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: with the Lives of the Holy Apostles, and their successors for three hundred years after the crucifixion.

Newman's Concordance to the Bible, 1650.

Cruden's Concordance, 1738.

Clarke's Concordance to the Holy Bible, 1696.

Brown's Dictionary of the Holy Bible.

*The Truth of the Christian Religion* by Hugo Grotius in six books, written in Latin by Grotius, and now translated into English, with an addition of a seventh book against the present Roman Church, 1694. (Hugo Grotius was the father of International Law).

*Evidences of Christianity*, a view of the evidences of Christianity In three parts. 1795.

*Barclay's Minute Philosopher*, in seven dialogues, containing an Apology for the Christian Religion, against those who are called Freethinkers, 1732.

The works of Reverend John Witherspoon, D.D., LL.D., late President of the College, at Princeton, New Jersey. To which is prefixed an account of the author's life, in a sermon occasioned by his death, by the Reverend Dr. John Rodgers of New York. In three volumes. (Dr. Witherspoon was the only preacher-signer of the Declaration of Independence). It was Witherspoon, in 1781, noting the differences in the English language as spoken in America, who coined the word "Americanism."

*A Scriptural Account of the Millenium*: being a Selection from the Prophecies concerning Christ's Second Coming, and personal glorious reign on earth a thousand years. To which are added a number of arguments to show that this event has not yet taken place. Also, some observations, calculated to stimulate man to an enquiry into the matter to make the necessary preparation for that all important event. By Benjamin Gorton, 1802.

*The Christian's Duty from the Sacred Scriptures*, containing all that is necessary to be believed and practiced in order to our Eternal Salvation. Collected out of the Old and New Testament, and the books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus, etc. (Initialed by Jefferson).

*Tracts in Religion: The Blessings of America*. A sermon preached in the Middle Dutch Church, on the 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1791, being the Anniversary of the Independence of America. By William Linn.

*Principles of Civil Union and Happiness considered and Recommended*. A sermon by Elizur Goodrich.

The above list of books on the subject of religion in Jefferson's library represents but a small fraction of his collection on Christianity. It is reminiscent of a well-equipped and balanced library of Bibles and Christian works of the highest calibre. It also shows

Thomas Jefferson's extensive personal collection of Old and New Testaments, intact. These hold preeminence in his library of books entitled, "Religion." This precludes "deism," "atheism" and alien false religions which are non-existent in this founding father's extensive collection. Biblical sermons, such as "The Blessings on America" also show the inseparable link between Christianity and the government. It would seem questionable, whether one would collect such an extensive library on Bibles and Bible-related materials if the word of god was not an integral part of one's life.

During a recent visit to Monticello, Jefferson's gracious southern home in Charlottesville, Virginia, I was shown a number of Christian paintings in the hall, parlour and dining room of that handsome estate. I subsequently obtained a hand-written catalogue made up by Jefferson himself, on his paintings and objets d'art at Monticello. Having studied this great founding father and having reached the conclusion that his foremost adherence was to the teachings of the Bible, it did not surprise me at all to find that no less than 25 works of the great masters belonging to Jefferson reflected the Old and New Testament narrative. In perusing this catalogue by Jefferson, one is struck by the founding father's knowledge, love, awe and respect for the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. Jefferson relates vividly in his own words, events in Jesus Christ's life, taking you to chapter and verse of Scripture. He also describes Joseph "in the act of fervent prayer"; the sacrifice of Isaac and God's miraculous intervention, from Genesis 22; Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son returning home; the Transfiguration; Jesus before Pilate, from Mark 15 and Matthew 27; the crucifixion from Luke 23:44-45 "when the sun is darkened, the temple rent, the atmosphere kindled with lightning, the tombs open and yield their dead;" the Descent from the Cross and other cataclysmic gospel events. They are catalogued by Jefferson...

Again, as with this founding father's library on Christianity, it would be preposterous for him to take the time and care to describe each event portrayed in these works of art in detail from Scripture if they contradicted his beliefs....

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