

FOUNDING FOLLY

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Rom. 1:22

THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743-1826)

JESUS & CHRISTIANITY

1. "Of all the systems of morality, ancient or modern, which have come under my observation, none appears to me so pure as that of Jesus... I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus."
2. "I am a materialist; [Jesus] takes the side of spiritualism. He preaches the efficacy of repentance towards forgiveness of sin; I require a counterpoise [counterbalance] of good works to redeem it, etc. etc."
3. "According to the ordinary fate of those who attempt to enlighten and reform mankind, [Jesus] fell an early victim to the jealousy and combination of the altar and the throne, at about 33 years of age, his reason having not yet attained the maximum of its energy, nor the course of his preaching, which was but of 3 years at most, presented occasions for developing a complete set of morals. Hence the doctrines which he really delivered were defective as a whole, and fragments only of what he did deliver have come to us mutilated, misstated, and often unintelligible."

THE "JEFFERSON BIBLE"¹

1. "I have made a wee little book, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus. It is a *paradigma* [paradigm or framework] of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank book, in a certain order of time or subject. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen."
2. "...a digest of [Jesus'] moral doctrines, extracted in his own words from the Evangelists, and leaving out everything relative to his personal history and character."
3. "There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and by arranging the matter which is evidently his, and which is as distinguishable as diamonds in a dung hill."
4. "Among the sayings and discourses imputed to [Jesus] by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others, again, of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being. I separate, therefore, the gold from the dross; restore to him the former, and leave the latter to the stupidity of some, and roguery of others of his disciples."

MORAL PRINCIPLES

1. "The same God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time."
2. "Truth is certainly a branch of morality and a very important one to society."
3. "No man has a natural right to commit aggression on the equal rights of another."
4. "Nothing then is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man."
5. "Give up money, give up fame, give up science, give the earth itself and all it contains, rather than do an immoral act."

MORAL FOUNDATION

1. "Reading, reflection and time have convinced me that the interests of society require the observation of those moral precepts only in which all religions agree."

2. "Everyone must act according to the dictates of his own reason."
3. "...it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."
4. "Taste cannot be controlled by law. We must resist at all costs any attempt to regulate our individual freedoms and to legislate our personal moralities."

VISION FOR AMERICA

"The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father, in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter. But may we hope that the dawn of reason and freedom of thought in these United States will do away with this artificial scaffolding, and restore to us the primitive and genuine doctrines of this most venerated reformer of human errors."

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790)

1. "Here is my creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the universe. That he governs it by his providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another Life respecting its conduct in this. This I take to be the fundamental principles of all sound religion."
2. "As for Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the system of morals and his religion as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw, or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts to his divinity; tho' it is a question I do not dogmatise upon, having never studied it, and think needless to busy myself with it now, where I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble."
3. "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters."

JAMES MADISON (1751-1836)

1. "Who does not see that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christians, in exclusion of all other sects?"
2. "The establishment of the chaplainship to Congress is a palpable violation of equal rights, as well as of constitutional principles...Could a Catholic clergyman ever hope to be appointed a chaplain?"

JOHN ADAMS (1735-1826)

"Now, my friend, can prophecies, or miracles convince you, or me, that infinite Benevolence, Wisdom and Power [i.e. God] created and preserves, for a time, innumerable millions to make them miserable forever; for his own glory? Wretch! What is his glory? Is he ambitious? Does he want promotion? Is he vain? Tickled with adulation? Exulting and triumphing in his power and the sweetness of his vengeance? Pardon me, my Maker, for these awful questions. My answer to them is always ready: I believe no such things. My adoration of the Author of the universe is too profound and too sincere. The love of God and his creation; delight, joy, triumph, exultation in my own existence, 'tho but an atom, a molecule organique, in the universe; are my religion. Howl, snarl, bite, Ye Calvinistick! Ye Athanasian divines, if you will. Ye will say, I am no Christian: I say ye are no Christians: and there the account is balanced. Yet I believe all the honest men among you, are Christians in my sense of the word."

¹ Final Verse: "There laid they Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher and departed."