



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 6, 2023

NYC Mayor's Faith Comments Elicit Protests From Atheists

When New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a self-professed Christian, expressed his faith last week, his remarks not only [elicited praise from believers but criticism from those who don't or refuse to believe](#).

Adams said:

Don't tell me about no separation of church and state. State is the body. Church is the heart. You take the heart out of the body, the body dies.

I can't separate my belief because I'm an elected official. When I walk, I walk with God. When I talk, I talk with God.

When I put policies in place, I put them in with a God-like approach to them. That's who I am. And I was that when I was that third-grader, and I'm going to be that when I leave government.

I am still a child of God and will always be a child of God and I won't apologize about being a child of God. It is not going to happen.



AP Images
Eric Adams

Robert Jeffress, senior pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, responded, "The mayor is exactly right," adding that, "Liberals have taken that establishment clause [in the First Amendment] and perverted into something our forefathers never intended. I believe much of the chaos we're seeing in our country today results from trying to be good without God, and such a thing is totally impossible."

Arielle Del Turco of the Family Research Council said that Adams' comments do "not mean that the state must forcibly remove all signs of religion from schools or other public institutions."

And yet that is exactly what has been happening ever since the Supreme Court ruled decades ago to remove prayer from public schools. Its decision was based on that dreadful and insidious "reading" about the "wall of separation between the church and state" that the Constitution allegedly erected.

Rob Boston, who edits *Church & State* magazine for Americans United for Separation of Church & State, offered to instruct the mayor in his misreading of the founders' intentions: "Our offer to the mayor would be to meet with us, and we'd be happy to explain to him how separation of church and state protects his right to believe and the right of every one of his constituents and how we really can't have a free nation without that principle."



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Donna Lieberman, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), a chapter of the ACLU, weighed in on the side of the myth about the wall of separation that has guided the group's policies from the beginning:

We are a nation and a city of many faiths, and no faith. In order for any government to truly represent us, it must not favor any belief over another, including non-belief.

It is odd that Mayor Adams would need a refresher on the First Amendment. After all, he has sworn to uphold the Constitution more than once....

On matters of faith, the Mayor is entitled to his own beliefs. On the Constitution, he must uphold his oath.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) put in its own two cents:

Remarks you made at the New York Library interfaith prayer breakfast this morning [February 28] ... evince a shocking hostility to a core principle of our secular republic: secular government....

FFRF works to defend the constitutional separation between state and church, and to educate about nontheism....

Mayor Adams, your remarks are disgraceful. Not only is New York City not a place where the mayor of New York must be a "servant of God," but as mayor you are in fact a servant of the people. While as a private individual you are free to worship as you like, you are not free to use your secular office or its podium to promote those beliefs, while deriding your constitutional duties to keep religion out of government.

You took an oath of office "to support and defend" the U.S. Constitution, which is an entirely godless secular document. Your duty as an elected official is not to be "a servant of God" but to the Constitution and the people who it represents....

Attempting to impose your personal religious beliefs through your elected position is an insult to all New Yorkers, as well as to the core American value of separation of state and church.

The group couldn't resist the opportunity to promote its own religious agenda:

The members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation believe that nothing fails like prayer. Prayer is the ultimate cop-out, the ultimate admission that the invoker is giving up, by transferring personal responsibility to an imaginary being.

And then the group demanded that Adams retract his comments:

We are asking you to publicly rescind your ill-advised remarks that the mayor of New York is officially a "servant of God," which seemingly suggests a belief that you are anointed by God. After all, you have previously said that "God" told you to become mayor.

In the face of an active campaign by Christian nationalists to declare the United States a Christian nation, and undo many First Amendment protections, we consider these remarks



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insensitive and reckless.

In his own defense, Adams responded to reporters who questioned him about the separation issue:

I would not be the mayor of the City of New York if it wasn't that God saw something in me. I am the most imperfect, most perfectly imperfect, human being.

This is a country where on our dollar bills we say, "In God We Trust." The last thing I said when I was sworn in as the mayor, I said, "So help me God!" Every event that I start, I start with prayer....

I am so happy that there are a small number of people who are saying that "Eric's belief in God, he should not be talking about it as the mayor." No. As the mayor, I should be talking about my belief in God.

In reporting on the issue, Adam Carrington of the *Washington Examiner* made a good start: "The First Amendment does forbid Congress from making any law regarding an establishment of religion. It does not, however, require a total exclusion of religion from the public square, as [these groups] seem to believe these days."

Professor Daniel Dreisbach at American University clarified the issue for all time back in 2006 in his ["The Mythical 'Wall of Separation'"](#) published by the Heritage Foundation. Wrote Dreisbach:

This figure of speech ... has become the sacred icon of a strict separation dogma that champions a secular polity in which religious influences are systematically and coercively stripped from public life....

The First Amendment ... [is] entirely a check on civil government, specifically Congress....

The religious provisions were added to the Constitution [by the Bill of Rights] to protect religion and religious institutions from [the] corrupting interference by the federal government and not to protect the civil state from the influence of ... religion.

The [myth of the] wall, however, is [being used as] a bilateral barrier that unavoidably restricts religion's ability to influence public life; thus it necessarily and dangerously exceeds the limitations imposed by the First Amendment....

All too often the wall of separation is used to silence the church and to limit its reach into public life.... It is rarely used to restrain the civil state's meddling in, and restraint of, the church.

That's the core issue. The secular state cannot have its citizens bowing allegiance to anything other than, or higher than, the state itself. Any remarks by anyone, especially someone with the influence (and the character) of the mayor of the nation's largest city to speak the truth about the matter, must be dampened, diluted, and ultimately erased from the public conversation.

Good for the mayor for not bowing the knee to the secular myth of "the separation of church and state" that is being used to extinguish religion from the public square.



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