

Trump religion commission attacks separation of church and state

Patrick Martin
28 June 2026

A Religious Liberty Commission appointed by President Trump issued its 224-page draft report Friday, June 26, denouncing the separation of church and state and recommending dozens of actions to force fundamentalist Christian dogma into public schools and other government institutions.

This effort to promote right-wing political and religious indoctrination is being carried out under the rubric of defending the First Amendment, although that history-making document begins: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”

In reality, the First Amendment is being repealed in favor of theocracy, with religion crammed down the throats of school children in states like Texas, whose lieutenant governor Dan Patrick is chair of Trump’s commission. The state has just issued a required reading list for elementary school children which includes sections of the Bible, some to be read out loud in class. The state is also posting the Ten Commandments in every classroom.

At a press conference releasing the report, Patrick threatened punishment of any public official who criticized a religious practice as violating the separation of church and state. Speaking for religious fundamentalists, he said that such officials, whether in schools, the military, government offices or elsewhere, would be compelled to “point out exactly where you have violated the Constitution, because you have not, and from this day forward, that phrase should have no power over people of all faiths ever again in America.”

In a justly famous presidential letter in 1802 to the Danbury Baptists, Thomas Jefferson wrote that the First Amendment had created a “wall of separation between Church & State,” words that have been cited repeatedly in court decisions throughout the 19th and

20th centuries.

In a landmark 1879 case *Reynolds v United States*, the Supreme Court held that while the US government was prohibited by the First Amendment from regulating the *beliefs* of the Mormon Church, it could prohibit such *actions* as plural marriage, just as it could prohibit human sacrifice or other conduct disruptive of public order.

After citing Jefferson’s letter, the court’s unanimous 9-0 ruling declared that it was impossible to consider “the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land, and in effect to permit every citizen to become a law unto himself.”

The Religious Liberty Commission report attacks the Jefferson letter, declares the separation of church and state to be an invention of liberal justices of the Warren Court in the 1950s, and perverts the history of the founding of the American republic and the significance of the First Amendment.

One would not know, plowing through the 224-page report, that 10 of the original 13 states had established churches at the time of the adoption of the Constitution—Congressionalist in New England, Anglican/Episcopalian in the southern slave states and New York. Only Rhode Island, founded by dissenters fleeing Puritan Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Delaware (heavily Quaker) had no established church.

But by the early 19th century, under the impulse given by the revolution (and the Bill of Rights) all states had disestablished their churches, cutting off the flow of public money into church coffers, creating indeed Jefferson’s “wall of separation.” As the public school system developed, religious education in the classroom faded out (banned outright in 1825 by the New York City Council) and became the purview of private religious schools and churches.

The Trump commission's report ignores this history and invents its own, according to which secularism was imported into the United States in the 1950s, under the influence of European intellectuals like Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault and Friedrich Nietzsche. Why this purportedly foreign doctrine was then supposedly embraced by the Warren Court, the authors of the report do not explain—nor does it make any sense, historically or factually.

Like all such official documents, what is left out of the religious liberty report is in many ways even more revealing that the lies, distortions and false arguments that it contains. There is no mention of deism, the quasi-atheist agnosticism of Jefferson and many other "Founding Fathers." Indeed, the words atheism, agnosticism and unbelief simply do not appear.

There is no reference to the fact that "no religion" is the fastest growing belief structure in America. Instead, fundamentalist Christianity is treated as the dominant religious viewpoint, or at least the one which the authors of the report want to make dominant. The report denounces antisemitism (described in such a way that it refers mainly to criticism of the state of Israel) but never mentions Islamophobia, a form of bigotry that has engulfed large sections of the Republican Party, particularly in Texas.

Critics of the commission, including from more liberal and interfaith groups, as well as advocates of secularism and atheism, have pointed out that the Trump commission is packed with hand-raisers for the Christian Right—all of them, of course, political backers of Trump, or they would not have been selected.

Besides Lt. Gov. Patrick, the vice chair is former Trump cabinet official Ben Carson. Other members include the Reverend Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, Kelly Shackelford, CEO and chief counsel for First Liberty Institute, the billionaire-backed legal shop for lawsuits challenging gay rights and other "offenses" against Christian fundamentalism, Paula White-Cain, Trump's personal pastor. And let us not forget that notable constitutional and theological expert Phil McGraw (television personality Dr. Phil), whose qualifications as a defender of democratic rights are no better than his fellow commissioners.

Rev. Paul Raushenbush, a plaintiff in a lawsuit by liberal and interfaith groups challenging the

composition of the commission, said in a statement that its report: "reflects the narrow, Christian nationalist worldview of the illegitimate commission. ... A betrayal of the original intention of the promise of religious freedom guaranteed in the First Amendment, the report and the commission behind it fail to represent and uplift the importance of religious diversity and tolerance for all faiths in our country—not just a special, chosen few. The report is a wish list of divisive, unpopular ideas far-right religious groups have pushed for years."

The commission issued "12 Key Recommendations to Strengthen Religious Liberty for All Americans," which effectively require all departments of the federal government to intervene against the (nonexistent) "persecution" of religious Americans. This includes the creation of snitch lines for anonymous reporting of "religious liberty violations," the repeal of the "Johnson Amendment," a legal provision that bars tax-exempt organizations like churches from endorsing and donating to political candidates, and allowing far wider use of religious exemptions from vaccination, particularly for members of the military.

As opposed to the absurd portrayal of Christianity being under attack from the government—in no other advanced capitalist country is there such an assiduous promotion of the "Judeo-Christian" heritage—the real crisis of the religious establishment is the growing popular rejection of all forms of religion, particularly among young people, where nonbelief in god is by far the largest segment of the population.

A series of Supreme Court decisions over the last 15 years has sought to counter the impact of the rising tide of secularism and the growing support for democratic rights of gays, lesbians, Muslims and other minorities, which are anathema to the Christian fascists.

Moreover, among military-intelligence officials and the decisive sections of the super-rich, there is a clear understanding that religious illusions are vital for the mobilization of the American population in imperialist wars, particularly those of the future in which millions could be forced to give their lives.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)