

1) What, according to Wood, was the principle motivation for the American separation between church and State?

“The principal source of our separation of church and state was never enlightened rationalism, important as that is to us today, but rather the growing realization by various competing religious groups that it was better to neutralize the state in matters of religion than run the risk of one of their opponents gaining control of the government.” (7)

This is the premise of American religious freedom, and the reason that it came about is, in my opinion, uniquely American. Solutions like this arise so often in American politics, and almost every bill, law, and line in the constitution is based on compromise. It's the same type of compromise that represented African Americans as 3/5ths of a White man that brought about religious freedom. If nobody can get their way, then the best thing to do is compromise. The rapid expansion of religious sects in America during this time period is exactly what brought about this core compromise, and it's extremely important to recognize that at no point, as Wood points out, was rationalism or forwards thinking applied here, religious freedom was merely a means to an end, the end being a functional government.

2) What was the effect of the Great Awakening(s) on American's attitudes toward religion? How did this influence/contribute to the constitutional separation of church and state?

The Great Awakening(s), at their core, taught individualism. These revivals of thinking emphasized personhood and the personal freedom of ideology and a more direct relationship with God. The Awakenings also consistently broke the dominance of “old state churches” bringing about not only individual freedom, but also a detachment from the “Old World” (7). As there were so many denominations of the Church constantly emerging, in order to form a functional society, religious tolerance became more of a practical necessity.

When it came to the framing of the Constitution, the Founding Fathers, and more namely Thomas Jefferson, were strongly pushed by these shifting attitudes towards religion and installed religious freedom in the first amendment to the Constitution.

3) What was the paradox at the heart of Calvinist thought according to Hamilton?

At the core of Calvinism lies this contradictory belief, according to Hamilton: there ought to exist a profound distrust of unchecked power while a strong upholding of collective governance. This idea appears a lot in the Constitution, where on one hand we have many checks and balances throughout our federal system, while on the other hand we have attempted to establish a republic where governance was based on the principle of elected representatives.

4) How did the Founders' theologically-influenced view of human nature influence the representative (electoral) system we have today?

The Founders' theologically-influenced view's influence of human nature the system we have today can be best viewed through a Calvinist lens. Hamilton highlights the Calvinist emphasis on total mistrust in individual power, in turn bringing about the establishment of the Electoral College. The Electoral College is an indirect election format that supposedly buffered against the pitfalls that Calvinism preached about individualism. The framers used mechanisms like the Electoral College to navigate this apparent paradox at the center of Calvinist thought.