



"Ye Will Say I Am No Christian": The Thomas Jefferson/John Adams Correspondence on Religion, Morals, and Values

Bruce Braden

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The "Culture Wars" have produced a lot of talk about religion, morals, and values, with both sides often hearkening back to our Founding Fathers. Here is your chance to learn firsthand what two of the most influential pillars of the American Republic thought about these perennial topics. From 1812 to July 4, 1826 — when ironically death claimed both men — Thomas Jefferson and John Adams exchanged letters touching on these still controversial issues.

These little-known letters contain many surprising revelations. In the 1800 presidential election, in which the Republican Jefferson opposed the Federalist Adams, religion was a topic of hot debate, as reflected in this correspondence written many years after. What was it about Jefferson's religious beliefs that provoked such vitriol against him in the campaign? And what was there in Adams's theology that prompted certain Calvinists and Trinitarians to label him "no Christian"? Though they expressed different opinions, Jefferson and Adams agreed on what they called the "corruptions of Christianity." Despite their criticisms and their critics, both men considered themselves Christians, in different senses of the term.

Hearing these champions of liberty and freedom of religion speak out frankly on church and state, the Bible, Jesus, Christianity, morality, and virtue, modern readers may well ask themselves whether either of these Founding Fathers could today be elected president. Editor Bruce Braden has done us all a service by collecting this revealing and intimate historical correspondence on topics that continue to stir emotions and debate in the 21st century.

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