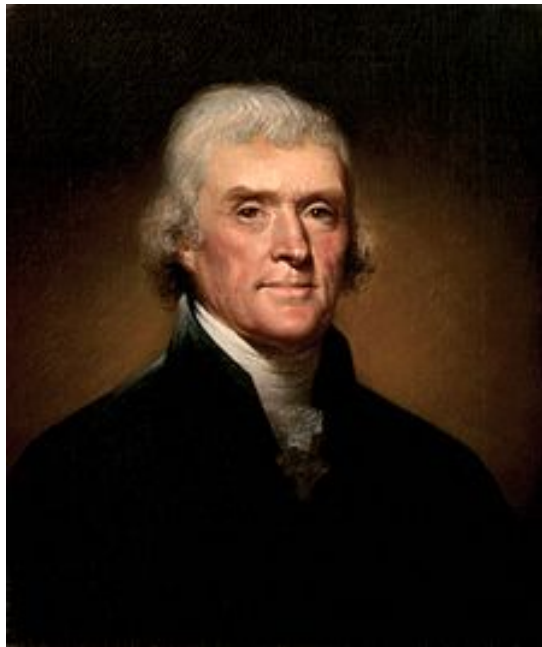


DAY 1

Guiding question:

What were Thomas Jefferson's true religious beliefs?



Name:

Date:

INTRODUCTION HANDOUT: Jefferson's advice on studying religion

BACKGROUND:

From his Paris residence, Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to his 17-year-old nephew, Peter Carr, on August 10, 1787. In the letter, Jefferson advises Peter on how to receive a well-rounded education. In one part of his correspondence, Jefferson recommends how to study religion.

DIRECTIONS:

Read the excerpt below. Then, write your answer to the questions that follow.

"Dear Peter,

...

Religion. Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place, divest yourself of all bias in favor of novelty and singularity of opinion. Indulge them in any other subject rather than that of religion. It is too important, and the consequences of error may be too serious. On the other hand, shake off all the fears and servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear."

-From letter written by Thomas Jefferson to Peter Carr, August 10, 1787

Source: <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/letters-of-thomas-jefferson/jefl61.php>

- 1) Jefferson wrote: "Divest yourself of all bias in favor of novelty and singularity of opinion." Put this in your own words. What is he asking Peter to do?
- 2) Jefferson also wrote: "Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion." Put this in your own words. What is he asking Peter to do?
- 3) Based on your reading of this excerpt, do you think Jefferson believed there was a god? Use at least two sentences to explain your opinion.

JEFFERSON'S BELIEFS: USING SOURCES

BACKGROUND:

What should a person have to do to become a member of a religion? Does one have to follow all of the religion's traditions and accept all of that religion's beliefs? And if they don't, can they still call themselves a member? These questions need to be asked when examining the religious beliefs of Thomas Jefferson. Before, during, and after Jefferson's time, the common law of England – which was used by some communities and governments in America – made it a crime to deny any piece of orthodox Christianity. Jefferson was one such denier; he did not believe that Jesus performed the miracles described in the Bible, for example. Jefferson thought they were fables. And because of that, he received, and still does receive, criticism.

What did Jefferson truly believe? Was he a Christian? Was he an atheist?

Using an introductory video clip, primary, and secondary sources, you and your partner will create a historical argument and answer for yourself these questions.

INTRODUCTORY VIDEO: "Jefferson's Secret Bible"

Video source:

<http://www.smithsonianchannel.com/sc/web/show/140747/jeffersons-secret-bible#a-brief-history-of-the-jefferson-bible>

DIRECTIONS: As you watch, form an answer to the questions below. After the clip is finished, you will turn to your partner and share your answers. Then, you will share with the entire class.

What inspired Jefferson to create his own text called *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*? According to him, what was wrong with the Bible?

*DIRECTIONS: You and your partner will read through each source and answer the analysis questions that follow. You will then use your answers to write an argument that answers: **What did Jefferson believe? Was he a Christian? Was he an atheist?***

SOURCE 1

"I too have made a wee little book, from the same materials, which I call the Philosophy of Jesus. it is a paradigma 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. it is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus, very different from the Platonists, who call me infidel, and themselves Christians and preachers of the gospel, while they draw all their characteristic dogmas from what it's Author never said nor saw. they have compounded from the heathen mysteries a system beyond the comprehension of man..."

-Excerpt from letter written by Thomas Jefferson to Charles Thomson, Jan. 9, 1816

Source: <http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-religious-beliefs>

Analysis questions. *Write your answers in complete sentences below.*

According to the excerpt, what did Jefferson make?

Can you call yourself a member of a religion if you pick and chose what to believe from that religion?

SOURCE 2

"...the subject of religion, a subject on which I have ever been most scrupulously reserved. I have considered it as a matter between every man and his maker, in which no other, & far less the public, had a right to intermeddle."

-Excerpt from letter written by Thomas Jefferson to Richard Rush, May 31, 1813

Source: <http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-religious-beliefs>

Analysis questions. *Write your answers in complete sentences below.*

What is Jefferson saying about the role of religion in the public square?

Based on this excerpt, are Jefferson's views of religion more like those of Martin Luther or Elizabeth I? Explain your reasoning.

SOURCE 3

"No one sees with greater pleasure than myself the progress of reason in it's advances towards rational Christianity. When we shall have done away the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three; when we shall have knocked down the artificial scaffolding, reared to mask from view the simple structure of Jesus, when, in short, we shall have unlearned every thing which has been taught since his day, and got back to the pure and simple doctrines he inculcated, we shall then be truly and worthily his disciples: and my opinion is that if nothing had ever been added to what flowed purely from his lips, the whole world would at this day have been Christian.

-Excerpt from letter by Thomas Jefferson to Timothy Pickering, Feb. 27, 1821

Source: <http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-religious-beliefs>

Analysis questions. *Write your answers in complete sentences below.*

Jefferson writes about a "rational Christianity." What does he mean by that? Can you ever make a religion 100% rational?

Jefferson writes: "If nothing had ever been added to what flowed purely from his lips, the whole world would at this day have been Christian." Whose lips is he talking about? Who are the people who made these additions?

Based on this excerpt, do you think Jefferson believes in a god?

SOURCE 4

"It is one of the minor ironies of history that such slanders should have been so generally and so long believed about the man whose knowledge of and admiration for the teachings of Jesus have never been equaled by any other President."

-Henry Wilder Foote, historian,

Source: Foote, Henry Wilder. *Thomas Jefferson: Champion of Religious Freedom, Advocate of Christian Morals*. Boston, 1947.

Is this source defending or criticizing Jefferson's views on religion and spirituality?

Circle one: **defending** **criticizing**

How is this source defending/criticizing Jefferson? Explain in at least 2 sentences.

SOURCE 5

"Should the infidel Jefferson be elected to the Presidency, the seal of death is that moment set on our holy religion, our churches will be prostrated, and some infamous prostitute, under the title of goddess of reason, will preside in the sanctuaries now devoted to the worship of the most High."

-New England Palladium newspaper, 1800

Source: <http://www.trivia-library.com/b/u-s-president-thomas-jefferson-quotes-about-jefferson.htm>

Is this source defending or criticizing Jefferson's views on religion and spirituality?

Circle one: **defending** **criticizing**

How is this source defending/criticizing Jefferson? Explain in at least 2 sentences.

SOURCE 6

“...[Jefferson] separated the church and the state in the interest of both and made it possible for men to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience.”
-Claude Bowers, *historian, 1930*

Source: Bowers, Claude. *Civil and Religious Liberty: Jefferson, O'Connell*. Worcester, Mass., 1930

Is this source defending or criticizing Jefferson's views on religion and spirituality?

Circle one: **defending** **criticizing**

How is this source defending/criticizing Jefferson? Explain in at least 2 sentences.

SOURCE 7

"...[Jefferson] writes aghast the truths of God's words; who makes not even a profession of Christianity; who is without Sabbaths; without the sanctuary, and without so much as a decent external respect for the faith and worship of Christians."

Source: <http://millercenter.org/president/jefferson/essays/biography/3>

Is this source defending or criticizing Jefferson's views on religion and spirituality?

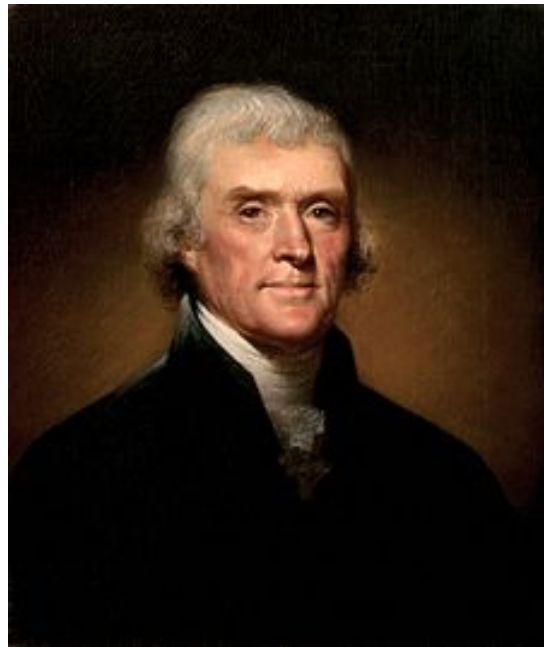
Circle one: **defending** **criticizing**

How is this source defending/criticizing Jefferson? Explain in at least 2 sentences.

DAY 2

Guiding question:

**Should religion have a place in
politics and government?**



Name:

Date:

DO-NOW – Where is this from? What does it mean?

DIRECTIONS: Read the quote, and write the answer to questions below.

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”

- 1) In what document does this quote appear?

- 2) What do you think this statement promises in America?

VIDEO CLIP: What is religion's role in our government?

Clip home: <http://millercenter.org/debates/religion>

DIRECTIONS: Watch the first 6:25 of a clip that describes a brief history of religion's role in the U.S. government, and answer the questions below.
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1) How are John F. Kennedy's religious beliefs unique?

2) During political campaigns, do you think journalists should ask candidates what their favorite Bible verses are? Explain your opinion in at least 2 sentences.

3) How has religion's role in our government changed since 1776?

A structured academic controversy

**THE DEBATE QUESTION:
Does the Declaration of Independence set a
precedent for religion in government?**

SIDE A:

Yes, the Declaration allows for religion to be a part of America's public square.

SIDE B:

No, the Declaration does not say that religion should play a role in our government and politics.

Step 1 – Partners prepare

Using this ProCon.org site

(<http://undergod.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=000062>), partners will re-read the excerpt from the Declaration of Independence. Then, find and read the evidence that supports your side of the argument. Fill out the handout to organize your evidence. If students want, they can also search for other sources beyond ProCon.org.

Step 2 – Position presentation

- a. Side A presents their position using supporting evidence from their handouts.
- b. Side B restates Side A's position to Side A's satisfaction. In other words, Side B says, "What I hear you saying is _____."
- c. Side B presents their position using supporting evidence from their handouts.
- d. Side A restates Side B's position to Side B's satisfaction. In other words, Side A says, "What I hear you saying is _____."

Step 3 – Consensus-building

Side A and Side B abandon their sides, and the group of 4 uses all of the evidence available to come to their best answer to the debate question.

Name:

Date:

HANDOUT: A structured academic controversy

Does the Declaration of Independence set a precedent for religion in government?

DIRECTIONS: Use this organizer to take notes that organize your debate.

SIDE A: Yes, the Declaration allows for religion to be a part of America's public square.	SIDE B: No, the Declaration does not say that religion should play a role in our government and politics.
<i>Summary of piece of evidence 1:</i>	<i>Summary of piece of evidence 1:</i>
<i>Summary of piece of evidence 2:</i>	<i>Summary of piece of evidence 2:</i>
<i>Summary of piece of evidence 3:</i>	<i>Summary of piece of evidence 3:</i>

What was the group's consensus? Write at least four complete sentences below to describe what was your best answer to the debate question, and why you decided on this answer. Be prepared to present your consensus to the class.

Name:

Date:

Homework assignment

WRAP-UP: Should religion have a place in politics and government?

DIRECTIONS: Using your class notes from the quote, the video clip, and the structured academic controversy, create one of the products from the list below that answers this question:

To what extent should political leaders be required to share their religious beliefs in the public square?

*****When answering this guiding question, consider:**

- Does it matter what the religious beliefs of a political leader are?
- Can we ever truly know what the religious beliefs of a political leader are?
- Should a political leader's religion be a private matter?
- Because a political leader is making important decisions that affect our lives, are we entitled to know their personal beliefs?
- What do our founding documents say about this matter?

LIST OF PRODUCTS:

- Write a five-paragraph essay
- Create an iMovie news show
- Create a movie poster and movie trailer
- Draw a political cartoon and write one paragraph describing it.