

A Communications Campaign:

**THOMAS JEFFERSON'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND TOLERANCE –  
A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT**

*Andrew Levison*

A Communications Campaign:

**THOMAS JEFFERSON'S PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND TOLERANCE –  
A DEMOCRATIC ALTERNATIVE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT**

*By Andrew Levison*

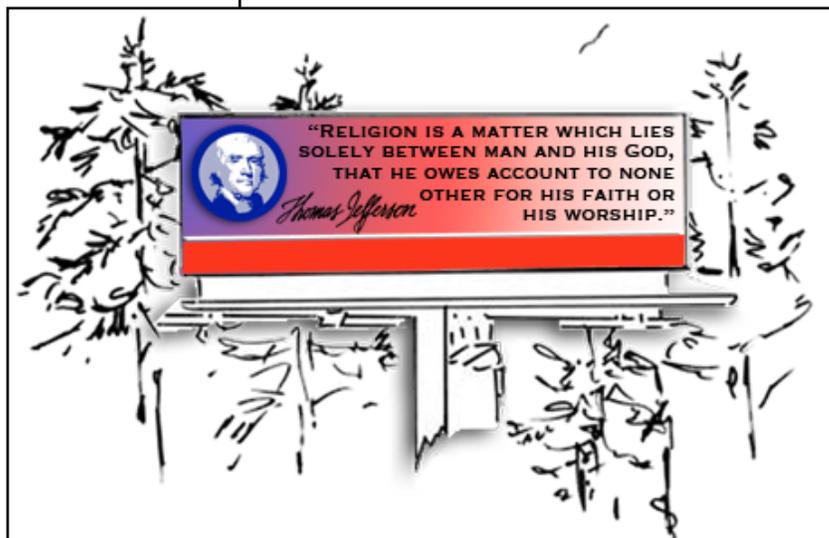
- The following pages outline a communications campaign that presents Thomas Jefferson's basic principles of religious freedom and tolerance as a coherent, deeply American philosophy. This philosophy stands in sharp contrast to the perspective of the contemporary Republican Party and the religious right.
- The campaign is constructed entirely out of Thomas Jefferson's exact words. This is intended to dramatically illustrate that those defending the opposing, "Christian Nation" view are not arguing with a straw man called a "religion-hating secularist" but rather are rejecting the views of a man whose philosophy is a fundamental parts of the nation's most basic set of values and the unique "American way".
- This campaign can be used as a platform by individual political candidates or by citizens groups or the Democratic Party as a whole to present a clear, coherent, deeply American philosophy about the proper role and place of religion in American society and politics.
- The campaign is centered on three types of media: billboards, print advertisements and 30-60 second spots for TV, YouTube and other webvideo outlets. These are (with the exception of TV) relatively low cost media. Moreover, billboards, in particular, have unique advantages for reaching certain kinds of audiences. Many ordinary middle-class Americans who have little interest in politics live in tightly woven media cocoons in which all the information they receive on many social issues is shaped by conservative media like Fox news and talk radio. In this media cocoon, liberal or progressive messages often go completely unheard. Strategically located billboards uniquely penetrate this cocoon and can carry a Jeffersonian campaign about religious freedom and tolerance to people who would otherwise never be aware of it.
- One specific advantage of this "Jeffersonian" strategy is that it poses a difficult dilemma for its opponents. Attempting to directly discredit Jefferson is not an appealing prospect. Few Americans will believe that he was really a "religion-hating secularist" or, (as the leading Christian homeschool textbook has it), "the antichrist" himself.

### 1. A BILLBOARD (AND MATCHING BUMPER STICKER) CAMPAIGN

The Jefferson quotes below are organized into three distinct messages, the first being almost universally held while the second and third become more pointed and challenging.

A conventional media approach would be to run each of these three messages sequentially for 6-8 weeks in the same billboard locations. The quotes can, however, also be used in a large variety of other ways.

#### MESSAGE 1 – RELIGION IS A PRIVATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EACH PERSON AND GOD



On a Billboard:

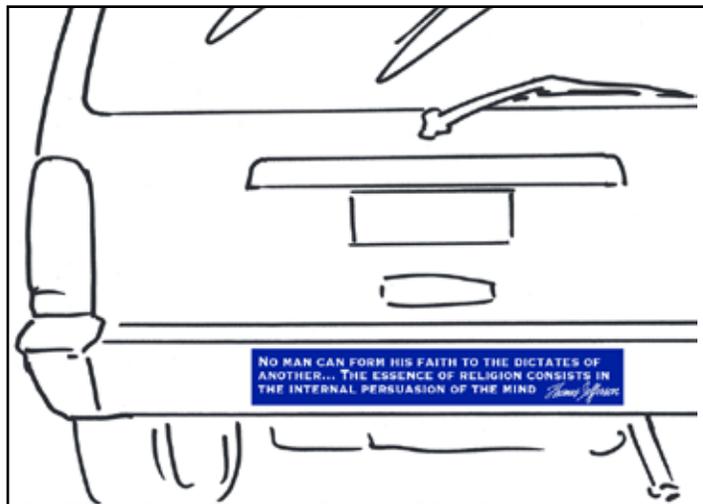
RELIGION IS A MATTER WHICH LIES SOLELY BETWEEN MAN AND HIS GOD, THAT HE OWES ACCOUNT TO NONE OTHER FOR HIS FAITH OR HIS WORSHIP

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

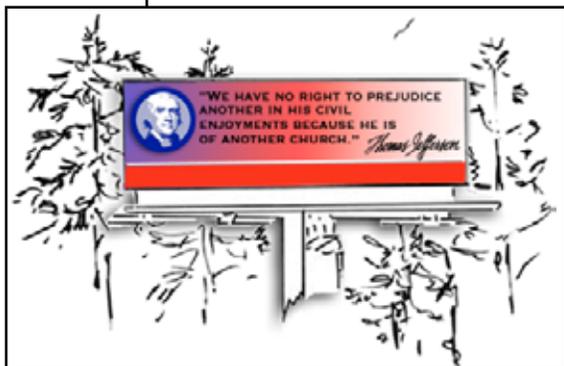
On a Bumper Sticker  
or Second Billboard:

NO MAN CAN FORM HIS FAITH TO THE DICTATES OF ANOTHER...THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION CONSISTS IN THE INTERNAL PERSUASION OF THE MIND

—THOMAS JEFFERSON



**MESSAGE 2 –  
AMERICA MUST UPHOLD FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE FOR ALL**



On a Billboard:

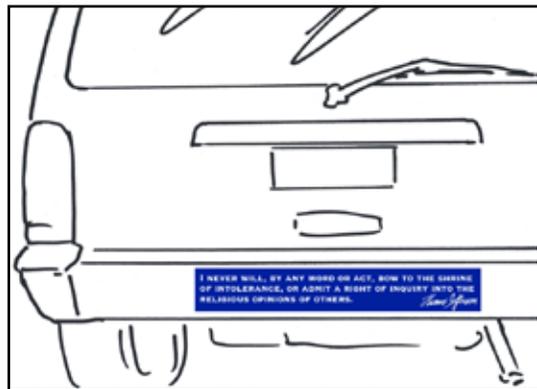
**WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO PREJUDICE ANOTHER IN HIS CIVIL ENJOYMENTS BECAUSE HE IS OF ANOTHER CHURCH**

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

On a Bumper Sticker or second Billboard:

**I NEVER WILL, BY ANY WORD OR ACT, BOW TO THE SHRINE OF INTOLERANCE, OR ADMIT A RIGHT OF INQUIRY INTO THE RELIGIOUS OPINIONS OF OTHERS**

—THOMAS JEFFERSON

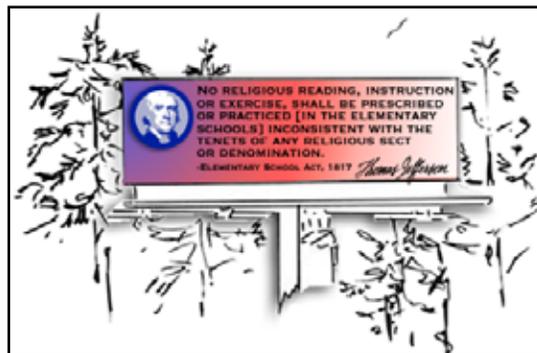


**MESSAGE 3 – THE STATE SHOULD NOT SPONSOR PARTICULAR RELIGIONS OR DOCTRINES**

On a Billboard:

**“NO RELIGIOUS READING, INSTRUCTION OR EXERCISE, SHALL BE PRESCRIBED OR PRACTICED [IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS] INCONSISTENT WITH THE TENETS OF ANY RELIGIOUS SECT OR DENOMINATION.” -ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACT, 1817**

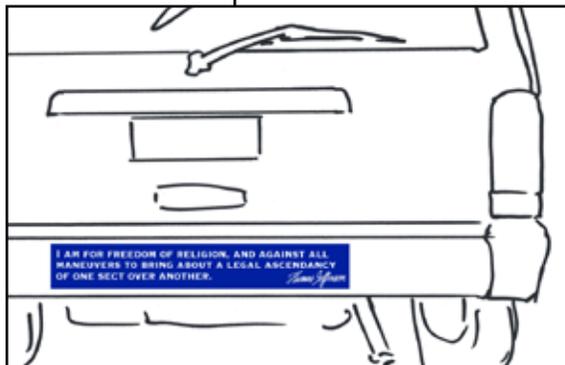
—THOMAS JEFFERSON



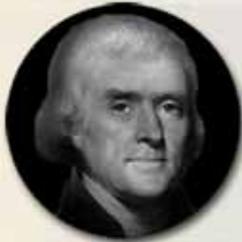
On a Bumper Sticker or Second Billboard:

**I AM FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION, AND AGAINST ALL MANEUVERS TO BRING ABOUT A LEGAL ASCENDANCY OF ONE SECT OVER ANOTHER.**

—THOMAS JEFFERSON



**2. THOMAS JEFFERSON:  
FIVE SELF-EVIDENT TRUTHS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND TOLERANCE**



**THOMAS JEFFERSON'S FIVE  
SELF-EVIDENT TRUTHS ABOUT  
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
AND TOLERANCE**

**1. RELIGION IS A PRIVATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EACH PERSON AND GOD**

RELIGION IS A MATTER WHICH LIES SOLELY BETWEEN MAN AND HIS GOD, THAT HE OWES ACCOUNT TO NONE OTHER FOR HIS FAITH OR HIS WORSHIP.

NO MAN CAN FORM HIS FAITH TO THE DICTATES OF ANOTHER... THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION CONSISTS IN THE INTERNAL PERSUASION OF THE MIND.

*Thomas Jefferson*

**2. PEOPLE'S MORAL PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE JUDGED BY THEIR ACTS, NOT BY THEIR WORDS**

"SAY NOTHING OF MY RELIGION. IT IS KNOWN TO MY GOD AND MYSELF ALONE; ITS EVIDENCE BEFORE THE WORLD IS TO BE SOUGHT IN MY LIFE; IF THAT HAS BEEN DUTIFUL TO SOCIETY THE RELIGION WHICH HAS REGULATED IT CANNOT BE A BAD ONE"

IT IS IN OUR LIVES, AND NOT FROM OUR WORDS, THAT OUR RELIGION MUST BE READ.

*Thomas Jefferson*

**3. AMERICA MUST UPHOLD FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE FOR ALL**

WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO PREJUDICE ANOTHER IN HIS CIVIL ENJOYMENTS BECAUSE HE IS OF ANOTHER CHURCH.

I NEVER WILL, BY ANY WORD OR ACT, BOW TO THE SHRINE OF INTOLERANCE, OR ADMIT A RIGHT OF INQUIRY INTO THE RELIGIOUS OPINIONS OF OTHERS.

IT BEHOOVES EVERY MAN WHO VALUES LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE FOR HIMSELF TO RESIST INVASIONS OF IT IN THE CASE OF OTHERS.

*Thomas Jefferson*

**4. THE STATE SHOULD NOT SPONSOR PARTICULAR RELIGIONS OR DOCTRINES**

NO RELIGIOUS READING, INSTRUCTION OR EXERCISE, SHALL BE PRESCRIBED OR PRACTICED [IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS] INCONSISTENT WITH THE TENETS OF ANY RELIGIOUS SECT OR DENOMINATION.

—ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ACT, 1817

I AM FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION, AND AGAINST ALL MANEUVERS TO BRING ABOUT A LEGAL ASCENDANCY OF ONE SECT OVER ANOTHER.

*Thomas Jefferson*

**5. AMERICA NEEDS TO UPHOLD BASIC MORAL PRINCIPLES, NOT SPECIFIC CHURCH DOCTRINES**

THE INTERESTS OF SOCIETY REQUIRE THE OBSERVATION OF THOSE MORAL PRECEPTS ONLY IN WHICH ALL RELIGIONS AGREE, (FOR ALL FORBID US TO MURDER, STEAL, PLUNDER, BEAR FALSE WITNESS ETC) AND THAT WE SHOULD NOT INTERMEDDLE WITH THE PARTICULAR DOGMAS IN WHICH ALL RELIGIONS DIFFER...IN ALL OF THEM WE SEE GOOD MEN, AS MANY IN ONE AS ANOTHER.

WHILE I CLAIM A RIGHT TO BELIEVE IN ONE GOD, I YIELD AS FREELY TO OTHERS THAT OF BELIEVING IN THREE. BOTH RELIGIONS, I FIND, MAKE HONEST MEN, AND THAT IS THE ONLY POINT SOCIETY HAS ANY RIGHT TO LOOK TO.

*Thomas Jefferson*

The print ad shown is designed to present five key elements of Thomas Jefferson's religious philosophy in a very clear and direct form. Taken together these five elements provide a basic platform or position on the proper role of religion in American politics and society that can be used by political candidates, citizen's groups or The Democratic Party as a whole.

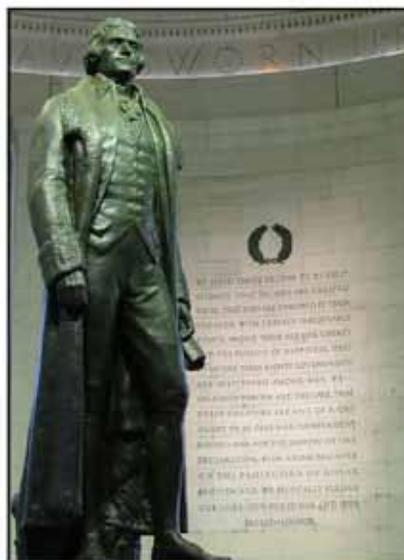
### 3. A 30-60 SECOND VIDEO SPOT CAMPAIGN

The storyboards below show three video spots using the Jefferson Memorial as the backdrop. The quotes can be edited to 30, 45 or 60 second versions and can be developed for website display, YouTube or broadcast TV.



**AVERAGE CITIZEN:**

“Since a majority of Americans like me consider themselves Christians, why shouldn’t the American government be able to officially support and establish public prayers and other expressions of Christian faith?”



**JEFFERSON:**

“I do not believe it is in the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline, or its doctrine. [Nor] that the general government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them [the religious societies]. Fasting and Prayer are religious exercises.... Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises and the objects proper for them according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer then in their own hands where the constitution has deposited it.”



**AVERAGE CITIZEN:**

"In high school I read that the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, which you wrote, was designed as an alternative to a bill that would have established Christianity as Virginia's official state religion. But I have heard that your Statute was not really intended to extend the same protection to all the different kinds of religious and spiritual belief, but only to prevent the state from favoring one particular Christian denomination over another. Is that true?"



**JEFFERSON:**

"[When] the [Virginia] bill for establishing religious freedom... was finally passed, a singular proposition proved that its protection of opinion was meant to be universal. Where the preamble declares that coercion is a departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, an amendment was proposed, by inserting the word 'Jesus Christ,' so that it should read 'a departure from the plan of Jesus Christ, the holy author of our religion.' The insertion was rejected by a great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend within the mantle of its protection the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mahometan, the Hindoo and infidel of every denomination."



**AVERAGE CITIZEN:**

“Doesn’t American society need the Christian religion to provide it with its basic moral values and principles?”



**JEFFERSON:**

“Every religion consists of moral precepts and of dogmas. In the first they all agree: all forbid us to murder, steal, plunder, bear false witness and so on and these are the articles necessary for the preservation of order, justice and happiness in society. In their particular dogmas all differ, no two professing the same. These respect vestments, ceremonies, physical opinions and metaphysical speculations totally unconnected with morality and unimportant to the legitimate objects of society... The interests of society require the observation of those moral precepts only in which all religions agree and that we should not meddle with the particular dogmas in which all religions differ and which are totally unconnected with morality. In all of them we see good men, and as many in one as another.