

The Integration of Church and State

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By

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In 1994 the parents of Raymond Raines, a fourth grader at Waring Elementary School, filed a suit against the St. Louis City School System and specifically against Raymond's principal. The reason? Raymond's principal gave him a week of detention and publicly ridiculed him for bowing his head in the cafeteria and thanking God for his lunch (Limbaugh 21). This is just one example out of hundreds where a public or semi-public official grossly over-reacted to the supposed "wall of separation between church and state."

There is an enormous misunderstanding about the role of religion in our society today, particularly when it comes to Christianity and our government. Our country's earliest settlers were Christians in search of a land where they could live according to Biblical principles in freedom. Our government was established by Christians using Biblical ideals. This was so widely understood and accepted that in 1799 our own U.S. Supreme Court declared, "By our form of government, the Christian religion is the established religion; and all sects and denominations of Christians are placed on the same equal footing" (qtd. in Wampler 35). Again in 1892, "No purpose of action against religion can be imputed to any legislation, state or national, because this is a religious people...this is a Christian nation" (55). Yet, even with statements by our government like these that are quite clear and a matter of public record, there is still a pervasive misunderstanding in our culture today about the relationship between religion and government. This confusion comes from a lack of understanding of our Constitution, specifically the First Amendment, and a lack of knowledge about our country's history.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads in part: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." (Wampler 77) These two phrases are commonly known as "the establishment clause"

and “the free exercise clause.” The first was included in the Constitution not to keep religion out of the government, but to keep the Federal government from establishing a national church. This was in direct response to their experiences with government lead churches like the Church of England. Keep in mind that establish should not be confused with endorse. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines establish as “set up on a firm or permanent basis,” (580) and endorse as “declare one’s public approval or support of” (562). The second of these two clauses was included to prevent the Federal government from telling people how to worship. This was in response to the many denominations of Christian churches already present in our country.

The phrase “wall of separation between church and state” is not found anywhere in the First Amendment, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, or any other official documents written by our founding fathers to establish the Federal Government. It is actually from a private letter written in response to the Danbury Baptist Association by Thomas Jefferson. The Baptists were concerned about a rumor that a particular denomination was going to be adopted as the official church of the United States. President Jefferson’s reply was merely an assurance that this was not going to happen. He wrote in part:

I contemplate with solemn reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between church and state (qtd. in Scarborough 84).

Jefferson’s intent was to assure the Danbury Baptists they had nothing to be afraid of in regard to being able to worship how they pleased. Unfortunately, the President’s words have been repeatedly taken out of context and twisted to mean something completely different. It was never the intent of our founding fathers to keep religion out of government. It was merely to

provide protection for its citizens from the possible oppression of a government run church like the Church of England.

The Church of England in the early seventeenth century was abandoning Biblical principles and becoming increasingly hostile toward some of its more devout members, specifically the two groups which later came to be called the Separatists and the Puritans. The Separatists, now called the Pilgrims, left England to escape persecution and search for a place where they could worship in freedom. They eventually left for the New World in the hope of establishing a society based on Biblical principles. Upon reaching this continent, the Pilgrims established a revolutionary form of government which would have a lasting affect on our country. The Mayflower Compact united its members into a government which derived its authority from the consent of those being governed. This contract also established the principle that all men were entitled to equal treatment under the law (Limbaugh 301-302). The Mayflower Compact also clearly laid out the reasons, as far as the Pilgrims were concerned, why they came to this continent, "...for the glorie of God, and advancement of the Christian faith..." (Wampler 62).

Less than ten years after the Pilgrims made their historic voyage in the Mayflower, the Puritans, who had also grown weary of the oppression of the Church of England, began to pour into this land of religious freedom and opportunity. These two groups were not alone in their establishment of colonies according to their faith. According to David Limbaugh in his book Persecution, "all early American settlements, from Massachusetts to Georgia, were comprised of Christians of all denominations, and indeed, all of the early American colonies were established on Christian principles" (303).

Our country's founding fathers were all products of this multi-denominational Christian background. This is apparent when you look at the denominations represented by the fifty-five signers of the Constitution, "twenty-nine were Anglican, sixteen to eighteen were Calvinists, two were Methodists, two were Lutherans, two were Roman Catholic, one lapsed Quaker and sometimes Anglican, and one open Deist" (Limbaugh 309). Interestingly, Benjamin Franklin, who was the open Deist, attended a wide variety of worship services, called for open prayer and gave money to many denominations. These men of faith never intended to keep God out of their government; exactly the opposite is true. I am not saying they wanted a theocracy, they simply realized that "It is impossible rightly to govern the world without God and the Bible" (George Washington qtd. in Wampler 56). Records of the Constitutional Congress held between June and September of 1789 clearly show that these men wanted to be obedient to God and follow His principles. The system of checks and balances used in the three branches of the Federal government are there as a realization of the corrupt nature of man described in the Bible. The writers of the Constitution also believed that man was created in God's image, and as such, enjoy an intrinsic worth and dignity. The result of this is rights and freedoms granted to us by our Creator, which no one has the right to deny.

In their wisdom to create a government with Biblical principles they also had the insight to guard against the tyrannical force that the Church of England had become. And so again, the First Amendment's establishment and free exercise clauses were put in place to protect worship, not exclude it. Unfortunately, these very laws, which were written to protect people of faith, have been used by certain groups and individuals to silence and restrict the faithful. In 1947, the case of *Everson vs. Board of Education* set a precedent by using the phrase "wall of separation between church and state" as public policy. The lawsuit concerned the use of state funds for

transporting students to their Catholic high school. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the high school, but because of the language used in the ruling, it started an avalanche of lawsuits attacking Christianity in schools, in government, and in public life (Limbaugh 17). In 1962, the Supreme Court ruled in *Engel vs. Vitale* that state-sponsored prayer in public schools was illegal (19). The 1985 ruling on *Wallace vs. Jaffree* says that public schools cannot even have a moment of silence at the beginning of the school day because students might use it for prayer (20). In 1987, students in the Alaska public schools were told they could not use the word “Christmas” in school because it contained the word “Christ.” They were also told not to exchange traditional Christmas cards and were forbidden from displaying anything with the word “Christmas” (Scarborough 86). These rulings and policies are just a small sample of what has been done in the last sixty years to try to remove Christianity from our schools.

The First Amendment contains the establishment clause and the free exercise clause to guarantee religious freedom for every American. Over the years it has been misinterpreted and abused, resulting in a progressive distortion of its content. It is a matter of public record that this country was founded by Christians on Biblical principles. It is a tragedy that our courts refuse to acknowledge the original intent of the First Amendment and bury our nation’s Christian history.

Works Cited

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Church and state, separation of church and state, separation of. The First Amendment [1] to the U.S. Divergence between Eastern and Western Theories. Two main Christian attitudes or, rather, theories of the relations of Church and State began to take definite shape from the age of Constantine. In the West the idea of the two societies, the ecclesiastical and the civil, with their respective rights and privileges, was maintained and developed. In the East, Eusebius of Caesarea advanced the view that as the empire was becoming Christian the two societies were merging into a single Christian society with the emperor as its head. The constitution states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Both the free exercise clause and the establishment clause place restrictions on the government concerning laws they pass or interfering with religion. No restrictions are placed on religions except perhaps that a religious denomination cannot become the state religion. However, currently the implied common meaning and the use of the metaphor is strictly for the church staying out of the state's business. The opposite meaning essentially cannot be Liberalism. Liberalism portal. Politics portal. v. t. e. The separation of church and state is a philosophic and jurisprudential concept for defining political distance in the relationship between religious organizations and the state. Conceptually, the term refers to the creation of a secular state (with or without legally explicit church-state separation) and to disestablishment, the changing of an existing, formal relationship between the church and the state. Although the concept is older, the problems with the term "church and state:" Although this term is in near universal use throughout North America, it can be confusing. The principle actually involves separation of religion, not just churches, from the government. The principal religion in the western hemisphere has been Christianity since the 16th century; it continues to be the choice of about 75% of the U.S. and Canadian adult populations. But, "religion" in the U.S. involves much more than Christian churches; it includes: Churches, circles, groves, gurdwaras, mosques, synagogues, temples, etc., and the organ... England has recognized the Church of England as their official religion for centuries. The queen is the head of the church.