

Why Separation of Church and State?

The phrase "separation of church and state" is derived from a letter written by Thomas Jefferson in 1802 to a group identifying themselves as the Danbury Baptists. In that letter, referencing the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, Jefferson writes:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. (Wikipedia)

[Jefferson, Thomas (1802-01-01). "Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists". U.S. Library of Congress.

<http://www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html>.

Retrieved on 2006-11-31.]

Under republican government religious officials were appointed just like political ones. Ancient Israel was different in as much as the King and the priesthood were separate and limited to their respective spheres of authority and responsibility, though interferences did happen as well. Later, under foreign supremacy, the high priest also held the highest civil authority in an autonomous theocracy.

In the West, the issue of the separation of church and state during the medieval period centered on monarchs who ruled in the secular sphere but encroached on the Church's rule of the spiritual sphere. This unresolved contradiction in ultimate control of the Church led to power struggles and crises of leadership.

At the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther articulated a doctrine of the two kingdoms. According to James Madison, perhaps one of the most important modern proponents of the separation of church and state, Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms marked the beginning of the modern conception of separation of church and state.

The concept of separating church and state is often credited to the writings of English philosopher John Locke. According to his principle of the social contract,

Locke argued that the government lacked authority in the realm of individual conscience, as this was something rational people could not cede to the government for it or others to control. For Locke, this created a natural right in the liberty of conscience, which he argued must therefore remain protected from any government authority. These views on religious tolerance and the importance of individual conscience, along with his social contract, became particularly influential in the American colonies and the drafting of the United States Constitution.

Another early user of the term was James Madison, the principal drafter of the United States Bill of Rights, who often wrote of "total separation of the church from the state." "Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion & Government in the Constitution of the United States," Madison wrote, and he declared, "practical distinction between Religion and Civil Government is essential to the purity of both, and as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States."

Under the United States Constitution, the treatment of religion by the government is broken into two clauses: the establishment clause and the free exercise clause. While both are discussed in the context of the separation of church and state, it is more often discussed in regard to whether certain state actions would amount to an impermissible government establishment of religion.

The separation of church and state is a legal and political principle derived from the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

The "Separation of Church and State" metaphor blurs the distinction between a doctrinal religion and a denominational religion. This places the doctrinal religion we have embraced in the same basket as an organized denominational religion with potential to merge with the state. The documentary evidence of the doctrinal Christian religion origin of this nation is voluminous. The Supreme Court thoroughly studied this issue, and in 1892 gave what is known as the Trinity Decision. In that decision the Supreme Court declared, "this is a Christian nation." John Quincy Adams said, "The highest glory of the American Revolution was, it connected in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with the principles of Christianity."

THE LUTHERAN VIEW of SEPARATION of CHURCH and STATE

[LCMS - Adopted 1932]

34. Although both Church and State are ordinances of God, yet they must not be commingled. Church and State have entirely different aims. By the Church, God would save men, for which reason the Church is called the "mother" of believers Gal. 4:26. By the State, God would maintain external order among men, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty," 1 Tim. 2:2. It follows that the means which the Church and State employ to gain their ends are entirely different. The Church may not employ any other means than the preaching of the Word of God, John 18:11, 36; 2 Cor. 10:4. The State, on the other hand, makes laws bearing on civil matters and is empowered to employ for their execution also the sword and other corporal punishments, Rom. 13:4.

Accordingly we condemn the policy of those who would have the power of the State employed "in the interest of the Church" and who thus turn the Church into a secular dominion; as also of those who, aiming to govern the State by the Word of God, seek to turn the State into a Church.

THEOLOGY OF TWO KINGDOMS

- Martin Luther's **doctrine of the two kingdoms (or two reigns) of God** teaches that God is the ruler of the whole world and that he rules in two ways.
- He rules **the earthly or left-hand kingdom** through secular (and, though this point is often misunderstood, also churchly) government, by means of law (i.e., the sword or compulsion) and in **the heavenly or right-hand kingdom** (his spiritual kingdom, that is, Christians insofar as they are a new creation who spontaneously and voluntarily obey) through the gospel or grace.

Luther's articulation of the parameters of civil government was a monumental step in the development of the separation of church and state. He argued for a clear distinction between two separate spheres: civil and spiritual. This is known as the Doctrine of the two kingdoms. The civil sphere deals with man's physical life in society as he interacts with other human beings; in this, man is subject to human governments. The spiritual sphere deals with man's soul, which is eternal, and which is subject only to God. The Doctrine of the two kingdoms is articulated by Luther in these terms:

God has ordained the two governments: the spiritual, which by the Holy Spirit under Christ makes Christians and pious people; and the secular, which restrains the unchristian and wicked so that they are obliged to keep the peace outwardly... The laws of worldly government extend no farther than to life and property and what is external upon earth. For over the soul God can and will let no one rule but himself. Therefore, where temporal power presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads and destroys souls. We desire to make this so clear that every one shall grasp it, and that the princes and bishops may see what fools they are when they seek to coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing one thing or another.

Luther encouraged civil disobedience toward any government which would encroach the line of separation between the civil and the sacred:

- We are to be subject to governmental power and do what it bids, as long as it does not bind our conscience but legislates only concerning outward matters.... But if it invades the spiritual domain and constrains the conscience, over which God only must preside and rule, we should not obey it at all but rather lose our necks. Temporal authority and government extend no further than to matters which are external and corporeal.

WHAT DOES GOD'S WORD SAY?

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. (Romans 13:1-7)

21 "Give to **Caesar** what is **Caesar's**, and to God what is God's."
(Matthew 22:21)

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

(Ephesians 2:19-22)

AMEN.

{The information for this sermon was taken from Internet *Wikipedia*, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod site, and from the *New International Version* of the Bible.}