

Inquiring Minds topic – 9 March 2018

Albert Myers, Moderator

Separation of Church and State?

Discussion Starters:

Does exemption of property tax for religious institutions violate required separation?

May government support ANY activity of a religious institution – if so, which and why?

Is tax relief (e. g. exemption from sales tax) government aid to religion?

Should exemption from government policy be permitted (e. g. conscientious objection)?

What about references to God in the Pledge, on public buildings, etc.?

Is prayer in public school classes, sports games, etc. permitted – if so, when and why?

May religious symbols or displays be in or on government property?

May the government pay for religious services (e. g. chaplains in armed forces)?

Florida amendment separating state aid for churches could be up for repeal: Cotterell

 news-press.com/story/opinion/2017/12/08/blaine-blaine-james-g-blaine-continental-liar-state-maine-democrats-hurled-little-rhyme-republic/931251001/

Blaine, Blaine, James G. Blaine!

The continental liar from the State of Maine!

Democrats hurled that little rhyme at the Republican nominee for president in 1884, an election otherwise remembered for contributing the word “Mugwump” to our political lexicon. (Those were otherwise loyal Republicans who supported Democrat Grover Cleveland, depicted in political cartoons as straddling the fence — their mugs on one side and their wumps on the other.)

Blaine was quite a guy. He was speaker of the House and ran for president three times in those turbulent post-Civil War times. But he is best known for a failed bit of bigotry that he tried to attach to the U.S. Constitution, forbidding any government aid to churches.

The Blaine amendment passed the U.S. House but failed in the Senate. Nonetheless, 37 states – Florida among them – adopted versions of it, and its repeal looks likely to be on our state ballot next year. A committee of the Constitution Revision Commission last week approved an

amendment that would scrap the “no aid” mandate, and approval by the full CRC seems like a good bet.

Approval by the Florida public – it would take 60 percent – looks a bit less likely. The Legislature put a similar proposal on the 2012 ballot and it fell far short of 50 percent.

The concept of the Blaine Amendment looks good on paper. We have a long history of church-state separation in this country and nobody is suggesting a retreat from First Amendment assurances of religious freedom.

But CRC member Roberto Martinez, a Miami attorney who sponsored the repeal amendment, said Blaine’s language is unnecessary today. He said sectarian organizations shouldn’t be barred from receiving government money for strictly non-religious services.

“If the church was going to use it in a way that would promote a particular religious objective, then I think it would run afoul of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment,” Martinez told the commission.

As speaker, Blaine wanted to burnish his presidential appeal by pandering to nativist fears and prejudices across the land. In that era, this meant Catholics. His message was what today we’d call a “buzzword” or “dog whistle” signal to voters who were worried that Irish and Italian immigrants, mostly, would take over the country. It just so happened that most of those people were Catholic.

The concept of government spending was a lot different then, too. Blaine’s followers made it seem like the government would be buying Bibles and building cathedrals, without his proposed ban on funding. Today, the government works amicably with religiously affiliated organizations on non-faith matters like adoption or health and social services and no one seems too upset about it.

What’s really at issue here is tuition vouchers for private schools, including those affiliated with churches. Gov. Jeb Bush’s initial education plan was stricken in court on other grounds, but voucher opponents also cited Blaine.

If they could get around the current state Constitution’s prohibition of public funding “directly or indirectly” to any “sectarian institution,” conservatives seem to believe they could have their voucher program for private schools – including non-denominational instruction by academies run by churches. While opponents certainly don’t harbor the anti-Catholic motives that stirred voters 130 years ago, keeping our version of the Blaine Amendment in Florida’s Constitution is useful in fending off the never-ending quest by school-choice advocates for public support of private schools.

It’s like neither side can state its real motives. Proponents call it religious liberty, saying an organization shouldn’t be barred from state support simply because it’s linked to a church. But they also need to get Blaine out of the way so they can fund tuition vouchers.

Opponents argue that repeal of the no-aid prohibition would force taxpayers to support churches they may or may not belong to. But their real purpose – at least for many – is to block anything that smacks of school choice.

If the repeal proposal gets 22 votes from the full Constitution Revision Commission, its next stop, it will go on the November ballot. Three-fifths approval by the voters is a high bar for any amendment, especially a controversial one like this.

And it could be extra difficult with a proposal for which neither side can state its real motives.

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Arguments Against Separation of Church and State

 [thoughtco.com/arguments-against-separation-church-and-state-721634](https://www.thoughtco.com/arguments-against-separation-church-and-state-721634)

by Tom Head

Most people who oppose separation of church and state do so for reasons that make sense to them but not necessarily to us. Here's what they believe, why they believe it, and why they're wrong.

America is a Christian nation.

Supporters of California's Proposition 8 criticize the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for using the Constitution, rather than what they describe as "God's law," as the basis of their rulings. Photo: Justin Sullivan / Getty Images.

Demographically, it is. According to an April 2009 Gallup poll, 77% of Americans identify as members of the Christian faith. Three-quarters or more of Americans have always identified as Christian, or at least they have as far back as we can document.

But it's really a stretch to say that the United States has been run based on Christian principles. It violently broke off from the explicitly Christian-identified British empire largely [over economic issues](#) that included rum smuggling, slavery was part of the original package, and the only reason the land we now call the United States was available in the first place was because it was taken over, by force, by well-armed invaders.

If that's Christianity, what does apostasy look like?

The Founding Fathers would not have tolerated a secular government.

During the 18th century, there wasn't really any such thing as a Western secular democracy. The Founding Fathers had never seen one.

But that's what "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" means; it reflects the Founding Fathers' efforts to distance themselves from European-style religious endorsement and create what was, at its time, the most secular government in the Western hemisphere.

The Founding Fathers were certainly not hostile to secularism. Thomas Paine, whose *Common Sense* pamphlet inspired the American Revolution, was a noted critic of religion in all forms. And to reassure Muslim allies, the Senate [ratified a treaty](#) in 1796 stating that their country was "in no way founded on the Christian religion."

Secular governments oppress religion.

There's no evidence to support this claim.

Communist governments have historically tended to oppress religion, but this is because they are most often organized around cult ideologies that function as competing religions. [In North Korea](#), for example, Kim Jong-il, who is believed to possess supernatural powers and to have been born under miraculous circumstances, is

worshiped at hundreds of small indoctrination centers that function as churches. Mao in China, and Stalin in the former Soviet Union were given similar messianic backstories.

But genuinely secular governments, such as those of France and Japan, tend to behave themselves.

The God of the Bible punishes non-Christian nations.

We know this isn't true because no governments founded on the Christian faith actually exist in the Bible. The Revelation of St. John describes a Christian nation ruled by Jesus himself, but there is no suggestion that anybody else will ever be up to the task.

Without a Christian government, Christianity will lose clout in America.

The United States has a secular government, and over three-quarters of the population still identifies as Christian. Great Britain has an explicitly Christian government, but the 2008 British Social Attitudes Survey found that only half the population—50%—identifies as Christian. This would seem to suggest that government endorsement of religion doesn't determine what the population actually believes, and that stands to reason. Would you base your religious beliefs on U.S. government statutes?

To consider in preparation for our discussion:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/03/magazine/a-churchstate-solution.html>

<https://law.justia.com/constitution/us/amendment-01/02-establishment-of-religion.html>

<http://time.com/5103677/church-state-separation-religious-freedom>

<https://www.thehastingscenter.org/news/questions-conscientious-objection-health-care>

and the similar <https://rewire.news/article/2014/05/14/why-we-need-to-ban-conscientious-objection-in-reproductive-health-care>



For Your Information - - IRS tax information for churches and other religious institutions:

<https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/churches-religious-organizations>