

A Christian Defense for the Separation of Church and State by Benjamin Cremer

Benjamin Cremer is a Christian minister in Idaho. His Defense of the Separation of Church and State is compelling. He spells out why he, as a matter of theology, believes in the separation.

One paragraph in the attached document got my attention as a Christian:

I encourage all Christians to consider how we might be destroying the very gospel we claim to hold so dear by wanting it mandated over others rather than living it out ourselves. Because mandating our beliefs by force of law against people's free will is one of the most effective ways of causing people to reject the God we claim to believe in with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

One of the claims in the Coalition's EdChoice voucher lawsuit is that vouchers violate the Ohio Constitution's declaration that "no religious or other sect shall have any exclusive right to or control of any part of the school funds of the state." We argue that the State of Ohio has no constitutional authority to direct taxpayer funds to religious schools.

A Christian Defense of the Separation of Church and State.

I believe in the separation of church and state as a Christian, not because I'm against Christianity, but because I know the history of Christianity.

It is because I have studied all about the tremendous harm that is caused whenever the church crawls into bed with the empire. The crusades, inquisitions, genocides, slavery, and subjugation of women, and persecution of people who don't believe the way "the church" demands, all done in the name of "preserving our Christian faith."

Whenever a government mandates Christianity, it ceases to be a matter of faith pursued by human freewill and therefore it ceases to have anything to do with Jesus and just becomes another tool to oppress people that are seen as "outsiders" by those in power.

I believe in the separation of church and state because of the teachings of Jesus. One of them being, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

So if I wouldn't want another religious group mandating my civic life, legislating their scriptures to be read in our public schools to my children or posting the commands from their god on public spaces, then I wouldn't want that done with my religion either to people from other religious and nonreligious backgrounds.

I believe in the separation of church and state because there are numerous Christian sects within our country alone, let alone within the entire world. Each sect has their own unique theology and interpretation of the Bible. So which Christian sect gets to dictate the kind of Christianity that is mandated?

As a Protestant, I don't want my civic life to be mandated by Catholics, nor would Catholics want their civic life mandated by Protestants. We've seen the horrors of that fight already in the conflicts since the Protestant reformation.

As a Christian in the Wesleyan tradition, I don't want my civic life mandated by Calvinist Christians or Baptists or Fundamentalists. As I am sure they wouldn't want their civic life dictated by Wesleyan Christians either.

Just imagine if Amish Christianity was mandated over all civic life. How would you feel about a "Christian nation" that made sure you couldn't use your car or any modern technology? Now apply that same logic

to certain Christian sects dictating public education or the decisions people can make regarding their own healthcare.

History has shown us that mandating one form of Christianity through the government leads to oppressing all outsiders, which even includes faithful Christians from other traditions as well.

That is another part of Christian history we often forget. Before the United States was founded, many fled here from a "Christian nation," which was Britain, which was mandating one form of Christianity over everyone else. Repeating that here would be to not only ignore the reasons why many people came here in the first place, but it would just show the world that we refuse to learn from our mistakes in the past and repent from them.

As an American and a believer in the 1st Amendment, I believe everyone should be free to live according to their own beliefs and not be mandated by the government to live according to a set of beliefs from a single religious group. Including my own. Only a government that is free from religious control can guarantee religious freedom for all.

This is why I believe in the separation of church and state and I am staunchly opposed to Christian Nationalism, which is both unAmerican and unChristian. Not only does it violate religious freedom, but Jesus called us to love our neighbors as ourselves, which I believe includes not shoving our religion down their throats and dictating their life decisions by mandate of law. That is simply not loving at all.

This is why I believe it is a bankrupt Christianity that insists on legislating its beliefs over everyone else. It is a hypocritical Christianity that demands things like everyone be subjected to Bible readings and the Ten Commandments in our public schools, yet would claim to be "persecuted" if another religion did those exact same things.

I deeply believe that when we Christians arrive at the point of needing our beliefs mandated by the government, it is because we have ultimately concluded that the truth of the message we claim to have from Jesus no longer has the power to stand on its own merit, so we need the government to do it for us instead. It declares to the world that we don't actually believe in the power of our beliefs at all. It declares to the world that the church has failed to be the church on its own, failing to rely on the power of God, and therefore needs the government to intervene.

Far too many people in our society have witnessed a kind of Christianity that insists its particular beliefs need to be legislated over others, yet opposes legislation that would help hungry students be fed in schools, bring increased wages for people working to take care of their families, paid family leave, affordable childcare, healthcare for all, teachers being paid well, curbing gun violence, funding the education system better and supporting it rather than vilifying it and constantly attacking it, or caring for our planet, and the list goes on and on.

Is this the kind of selfish and callous reputation we want as Christians? Where we see the government as a tool only to mandate our particular beliefs instead of seeing it as an opportunity to work together towards a society where all people are free, don't have to struggle to just have their basic needs met, and can live flourishing lives?

Is that the kind of legacy we want to leave behind? Are we really that fearful of other beliefs stamping out the gospel of Jesus that we have to resort to government mandates and using taxpayer dollars to legislate our beliefs? Isn't that just functioning out of fear rather than faith?

I encourage anyone who is unsure about this topic to go study church history for themselves. You can begin with the Holy Roman Empire and the Doctrine of Discovery. Or even more recently the British Empire and Christian imperialism and colonialism. We have tried having nations run by a Christian sect far too many times before and we must learn from those examples or we will repeat them.

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I encourage all Christians to consider how we might be destroying the very gospel we claim to hold so dear by wanting it mandated over others rather than living it out ourselves. Because mandating our beliefs by force of law against people's free will is one of the most effective ways of causing people to reject the God we claim to believe in with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

I believe in the separation of church and state because it not only allows the church to be the church and the state to be the state, but it also prevents the church from giving into the temptation to worship political power and allows it to faithfully embody the gospel of Jesus, including speaking truth to the powers of this world. The church simply can't speak truth to the power of the state when it has become one with the power of the state.

Jesus rejected Satan's temptation to control the kingdoms of this world and I believe we as his followers should too.

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." -Jesus