

Joe Nicholas

This is clearly a most relevant topic and I commend the publishers of *The Hinge* for taking it up. Of course, in the aftermath of 9/11, when there were so many religious services as ways of helping people deal with their grief, it was easy to forget that this is a country where there is a clear separation of church and state. However, it is encouraging that so many people found those services most acceptable in marking such a national tragedy.

I agree with Dr. Dunn's assertion of the companionship between freedom and responsibility, especially as he locates it in the story of creation in Genesis. A further reading of the passage shows that it was the exercise of freedom that led to the Fall of humankind. It came from a desire to be more than human. Thus, the temptation offered was that of being more than human and to be like gods (Gen.1:26-30 and Gen. 3:5). It is consistently the case that when we fail to act in accordance with what we are called to be, our freedom works against us.

The suggestion that the principle of the separation of church and state was intended "to protect the freedom of religion that had been abused, violated and ignored in the Europe of that day" is a very important point and should be repeated again and again. In listening to some of the discussions these days, the thinking seems to suggest that the separation was intended to keep

religion out of the affairs of state. It is to our benefit to bear in mind that laws and regulations must always be read in their context.

The fact of the matter is that the constitution of the USA was really a critique of the Europe of that time as the Founding Fathers sought to put this republic together. Likewise, in the biblical account of our Lord's crucifixion, it is made clear that he was put to death by the Roman government at the instigation of the Jewish leaders. In early fifteenth century Europe, our spiritual founder, John Hus, was put to death by the Roman Church with the complicity of the Bohemian government. The record is unambiguous that Prince Sigismund of Bohemia had assured Hus of the support of the State as he journeyed to the Council of Constance in 1413. He was even accompanied by two barons. Yet when Hus was arrested, Sigismund listened more to the voice of the Church than to the voice of his nobility as he abandoned Hus to his fate.

It must be affirmed that the Church in Europe did not come to such a high position of respect and authority in the governance of state through scheming at one level or another. When the powerful Roman Empire fell in the fifth century, it was to the Church that the people looked for continuity and stability. To the credit of the Church up to today, there were some outstanding bishops and popes who knew how to govern Church or State. The problem came when the Church did not easily give up its

power and remained a rival power to the State for centuries.

While there are some obvious differences between the two entities, some of the differences listed in the article are debatable. Surely, they do share similar constituents, similar sources of funding and even some purposes, but they differ vastly in methods and goals. It is a weak argument to suggest that government should not be required to provide support “for religious education of a few” and many other things mentioned in the article. Dr. Dunn could be betraying his own argument here. For example, by providing ten minutes of ‘quiet time’ at the start of the school day, you allow like-minded groups to meet for some form of bonding which is always going to be a plus for morale in school. We are now in the football season and even with the cost of television time, most teams get together for their ‘bonding’ session right before the whistle is blown.

The removal of that kind of bonding session from our children and young in the name of the separation of church and state is being unfaithful to the Founding Fathers. By providing it, we are recognizing that that kind of bonding time is essential to at least 50% of the people in this country. When we factor in those who must work, those who are physically unable to attend, and those who alternate between sports and worship on the weekend, the percentage of those connected to church, synagogue and mosque is much higher.

When the separation is practiced in this way, it could be seen as discrimination, but I do not believe that this is the intention of Dr. Dunn. However, let us follow the same argument some more. There is no argument about the wheel chair ramps, community playing fields, and parks with wonderful play areas for children; and the list could go on. Why should those who need no wheel chair, have no interest in sports, and who have no child pay for these through their taxes? It is simple. The government provides services for its citizens and certain groups require particular services.

It is a valid point that Church leaders should exercise great care in how they get involved in politics since their members are the same people who are sometimes fiercely divided politically. However, it would be a neglect of responsibility if the Church did not maintain its role of advocacy with reference to particular issues as they relate positively or negatively to its known teachings. The indifference to matters of the church in the United Kingdom is probably reflective of the failure to hold church/state relations in creative tension. It could be that they are where they are because their failure has continued for too long. Who knows what more will happen to our young ones as we keep pushing this brand of church/state separation?

Surely, there is separation of church and state here, but I suggest that it is under pressure because it is not what the Founding

Fathers wanted it to be and what it is now has not been defined. The Founding Fathers wanted *freedom of religion*, but too many of the advocates today are pushing for the *freedom from religion*. A part of the heritage of this country is its religious heritage. Going back to the creation story, when we strive to be what we are not called to be, we lose our identity. Already many parents are asking

questions about the identity of their own children.

When this separation is proclaimed and practiced in terms of the principle of governance rather than in the policies of governance, this republic will fulfill the dreams of the fathers and prepare the next generation for its future.

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Dorothy O. Burcaw

It is tempting to just say "Amen!" to Dr. James Dunn's article on the separation of church and state. I echo the comment on the last page of his paper noting, "A good many problems relating to church-state separation are those we bring upon ourselves by simply not insisting that the church be the church and the state be the state."

I was aware of the data he presented that fifty percent of the people in the United States are in weekly worship at a church, synagogue or mosque. In countries such as Great Britain where there is a state church, only ten percent of the population is in worship, yet every citizen is supporting the state church through taxes. Dr. Dunn notes, "For religion to be vital it must be voluntary." I echo another "Amen" to that.

If we, in the United States of America, strictly adhered to "let the church be the church and the state be the state" ideology

we would not have problems. Yet political expediency makes the separation fuzzy. There are certain religious ideologies which stress that they have the truth and will support candidates who have the truth as they see it. This would sometimes exclude women, even Christian women, and certainly those of another religion.

The fact that his discussion is titled separation of church and state, instead of separation of religion and state, suggests that we haven't even begun to recognize that Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and every other large or small religions should receive the same "rights" as Christians do. If we have true separation of church and state, has our democracy the right to deny building permits just because the locals don't want "them" in our neighborhood?

How far does our "religion" dictate how we deny good people election? There were those who expounded that if John F. Kennedy was elected, then he would have been the puppet of the Pope. I received an e-mail