

Article on
Churches and Political Speech

Published in the



December 13, 2017 – December 15, 2017

Uyless Black

Wednesday
December 13, 2017

The Press

A6 | Wednesday, December 13, 2017

Separation of church and state in jeopardy

One of the provisions in the tax bill that is being written by Congress would invalidate a 1954 law that bans churches (and other nonprofit organizations) from making political speeches or participating in other political pursuits. As of this writing, it is not known if this provision will be part of the final bill as the two branches of Congress have yet to reconcile their two versions. But the subject still warrants examination.

Before offering my opinion on this matter, here are a few words about my religious background. I grew up as a Southern Baptist. During that time, some members of my church would have been considered to be evangelical. So, please keep these facts in mind if you happen to disagree with my comments in this article. It is only through discussion that issues can be resolved.

I believe that most religions in America are beneficial to this country. Having been reared in a small country community, I was a witness to (and participant in) activities by the churches in this town that aided the community and helped bond its citizens together. Today, I see the fine work my wife and her church accomplish in northern Idaho communities, as well as the many charitable causes that are taken up by religious groups.

Conversely, I am aware that many of the wars and other pillages



Uyless Black

Guest
Opinion

though our nation has a deep Christian heritage, I am an ardent supporter of the separation of church and state. Granted, America was mainly created because of humans fleeing religious persecutions that were taking place in Europe.

In addition, during the 1700s, our forefathers held their meetings regularly in churches. They started off their sessions with a prayer. The first sentence of the Declaration of Independence mentions God.

Finally, while I do favor the separation of church and state, as did our founders, I think this issue has been taken to the extreme in America.

I see no harm in displaying mangers on courthouse lawns during the Christmas holidays as part of America's Christian heritage and tradition. If other religions wish to put up their displays as well, fine. Just obtain permission from the courthouse lawn-keeper in order not to over-run the shrubbery.

Prayer in schools? Display of the Ten Commandments on government property?

that have taken place throughout human history have come about because of religious differences among humans.

Finally, and the focus of this article: Even

They were part of my younger life, and I'm still spiritually intact and piously independent. In hindsight, I found them harmless.

But permitting these routines and displays could prove to be unwieldy. If Southern Baptists can do it, so can Catholics. So can Muslims, Buddhists, etc. It could cascade beyond control, and could interfere with the operations of education and government.

It is better to say, "Hands-off religion. Stay out of government business." While adding, "Hands-off government. Stay out of the religious business."

The founders of this country had experienced the dire consequences of co-mingling religion and politics in Europe. However, the specific idea of the separation of church and state does not appear in the Constitution. U.S. Courts and U.S. laws have made it the practice in this nation. (The First Amendment forbids Congress to make any law prohibiting the establishment of religion, but that is the extent that religion is discussed in this document.)

Then, where does the danger lie in joining religion and the state? This question is addressed in the second part to this article.

...

Uyless Black is an author, researcher and frequent Press analyst and commentator. He and his wife, Holly, reside in Hayden.

Friday
December 15, 2017

The Press

Op/Ed

Friday, December 15, 2017 | A5

A strong nation keeps religion, politics apart

Second of
two parts. The
first appeared
Wednesday.

By UYLESS BLACK
Special to The Press

Time and again, the co-mingling of a nation's religion and its politics has proven disastrous to the human race.

I will not waste your time by reciting hundreds of examples. If you are skeptical, just enter "religious wars" in your browser window. Also, search on "theocracy." You will find that theocracy "is a form of government in which a deity is the source from which all

authority derives." Thus, the church is in charge of the state, which means to a great extent, the church is in charge of you. If that idea does not chill your bones, consider the following:

Will the granting of the right of political speech for America's religions lead to a theocracy? I would be greatly stretching the point to make this claim. The rescinding of the 1954 law — if it occurs, as Congress is now considering — would not turn America into an Iran, but it would likely



Black

lead to the politicization of America's churches, even more so than they already are. It also would lead to further polarization of our nation's politics.

The Joint Committee of Taxation recently issued this statement: "The change could turn churches into a well-funded political force, with donors diverting as much as \$1.7 billion each year from traditional political committees to churches and other nonprofit groups that could legally engage in partisan politics for the first time."

According to <https://mail.aol.com/webmail/std/en-us/suite>: "Critics warn that the change could dramatically

increase untraceable political spending and lead to the creation of [phony] churches to take advantage of the new avenue for political spending."

From my perspective, it would divert, say, the Baptist church's mission from saving souls to saving politicians.

It would erode one of the pillars of stability of this nation: the separation of church and state.

It might lead you or me to found our own churches, which would give us a tax-free voice in politics and religion. New churches are founded practically each day in this country. If others can create churches, why can't

citizens form churches to promote their own brand of a politically based religion?

If the 1954 law is rescinded, I favor the taxing of churches. They can't have it both ways. Besides, it is estimated \$71 billion a year is lost because of the granting of tax-free status to churches.

In the opinion of many people, churches are tax exempt with the idea that this exemption helps foster healthy separation between church and state. Of course, other people favor the church being part of the state.

If so, which church or religious faction would dictate state doctrine? The philosophy

of my wife's church is quite different from the philosophy of my church. Would the party in power determine which church would be in power? Or like Iran, would the religious leaders determine and set the political policy of the nation, while the elected politicians sat in the back row of the decision making process?

Fatuous questions? Maybe — that is until one faces a situation in which the religious factions of a nation can influence the political agenda of that country. To some extent, this is already happening in America.

See BLACK, A7

BLACK

from A5

Giving formal political clout to the religious elements in our country would give them undue influence over political and commercial organizations. That is not how America has prospered. The strict separation of church and state in this country, with the state assuming primacy over the church, is one reason America has not gone to war over religions.

We should be wary of the Law of Unintended Consequences. Presently, conventional Christianity is the dominant religion in America. However, this situation is not cast in stone. Agnostics are increasing in number, and so are other religions.

I respect priests and preachers, but I do not want them to tell me how to vote.

...

Uyless Black is an author, researcher and frequent Press analyst and commentator. He and his wife, Holly, reside in Hayden.