

Chapter 20

On the SEPARATION of church and state

When America first declared its independence, one of the changes the colonists made was to establish a clear dividing line between church and state. Monarchies like the one in England merged church and the state, each supporting the power of the other. This resulted in terrible inquisitions that were carried out for purely political reasons. Thousands were brutally tortured and killed. Not exactly what Jesus would do.

America was colonized by individuals who in many cases were running from the distorted authority of the Church of England or the Catholic Church in Spain. When the American revolution emerged, the founders were very clear. There would be no "state" church. At the time of the American revolution the majority of Americans were agnostic, not members of any particular faith as much as Christian leaders over the years would have you believe otherwise.

Over the years the separation of church and state in the US has become less clear. A variety of fundamentalist Christian Churches have established themselves in political circles.

Although America allowed for religious freedom and the practice of many faiths, Christianity has become a powerful political influence in many communities. This continued to be reflected when we actually added "under god" to the pledge of allegiance in June of 1954.

The white male power structure has relied on fundamentalist Christian faith organizations to provide them legitimacy. In a sense it harkens back to the relationship of church and state in

monarchies. For example, the rise of the evangelical movement in the 1970's created a political power block that was actively involved in opposing a woman's right to choose, gay marriage and equal rights for women.

IF we allow religion, particularly one religion like Christianity to creep back into our political affairs, an important tenet of American democracy will be impacted. Americans are free to worship or not. Religious organizations are not supposed to get politically involved to the point that they are influencing national policy. This separation of church and state is a fundamental American principle that must be protected.