

Separation of Church and State

Rise & Shine, January 19th

Matthew 28:18-20

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Questions:

1. How do you define separation of church and state? Is it appropriate to seek to use your faith in matters of the state?
2. How do you feel about Christians using Christian practices in secular situations?
3. Should sharing faith be something that we deliberately seek out opportunities to do?
4. To what degree, if any, should the cultural climate of the times affect how we practice Christian traditions?

In the News

Space Force Bible Blessing at National Cathedral Sparks Outrage

A group that focuses on preserving the separation of church and state in the military is fuming over the newly formed Space Force using a Bible to swear in its first chief of space operations.

The blessing of what's being called "the official Bible for the new U.S. Space Force" at the Washington National Cathedral on Sunday drew an outpouring of criticism on social media and condemnation the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

"The Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF) condemns, in as full-throated a manner as is humanly possible, the shocking and repulsive display of only the most vile, exclusivist, fundamentalist Christian supremacy," MRFF founder and president Mikey Weinstein wrote in a statement denouncing the Bible blessing. "The utilization of a Christian bible to 'swear in' commanders of the new Space Force or any other [Department of Defense]

branch at ANY level is completely violative of the bedrock separation of church and state mandate of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution."

But Mike Berry, chief of staff to First Liberty Institute, told Fox News Weinstein's "constitutional arguments are almost worse than the Star Wars prequels."

"The tradition of using a Bible for swearing-in dates back to the very founding of our nation, with presidents and members of Congress doing so since George Washington," Berry explained. "It is in every sense part of our historic heritage and is perfectly legal."

In a tweet on Sunday, the Washington National Cathedral posted a statement describing the Bible that was blessed during a morning service as a Space Force official Bible "which will be used to swear in all commanders of America's newest military branch."

At the National Cathedral ceremony, the U.S. Air Force chief of chaplains, Maj. Gen. Steven Schaick, stands in full dress uniform before the congregation holding a King James Bible donated by the Museum of the Bible, a private Washington, D.C., institution whose board chairman is Hobby Lobby President Steve Green.

"Accept this Bible which we dedicate here today for the United States Space Force," intones the Rev. Randolph Hollerith, dean of the National Cathedral, "that all may so diligently search your holy word and find in it the wisdom that leads to peace and salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen."

The blessing of the Bible also features flattering words for President Trump, who strongly advocated for creating the Space Force, from the Episcopal Church's bishop suffragan for the armed forces.

"Almighty God, who set the planets in their courses and the stars in space," the Rev. Carl Wright implores, "look with favor, we pray you, upon the commander in chief, the 45th president of this great nation, who looked to the heavens and dared to dream of a safer future for all mankind."

Wright says the Bible will be entrusted to Gen. John Raymond, who last month assumed command of the U.S. Space Force.

The MRFF's Weinstein says he's lodging a formal complaint about the Bible blessing with Defense Secretary Mark Esper "to stop this train-wreck disaster in its stinking tracks from ever even leaving the station."

Weinstein says the "official Bible" of the U.S. Space Force violates the Balance of Free Exercise of Religion and Establishment Clause in Air Force Instruction 1-1, which states that leaders "must ensure their words and actions cannot reasonably be construed to be officially endorsing or disapproving of, or extending preferential treatment for any faith, belief, or absence of belief."

An Air Force spokesperson said in an emailed statement that while the Bible blessed at the National Cathedral will be used to swear in Raymond as chief of space operations, "there is no official religious or other sacred text, nor is there any requirement for a member to use any sacred or religious text, during swearing-in ceremonies." However, in a tweet, the cathedral called it "the official Bible for the new" Space Force and said it "will be used to swear in all commanders of America's newest military branch." — language that they claim came directly from Shaick's office.

Weinstein said MRFF has received many complaints from service members, Defense Department civilians and veterans, and plans to file a formal complaint to Defense Secretary Mark Esper. MRFF also plans to help its clients make formal inspector general and Equal Employment Opportunity complaints to stop the Bible from being used in this way.

MRFF also plans to sue in federal court if administrative remedies fail, saying using a Bible to swear in commanders of any military service violates several DoD regulations, as well as the First Amendment and the principle of the separation of church and state.

Matthew 6:1-4

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

"Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Romans 10:13-15

For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?

Prayer for Our Country (BCP p.820)

Almighty God, who has given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly *ask you* that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of *your* favor and glad to do *your* will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure manners. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought *here* out of many *nations* and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom in *your* Name we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to *your* law, we may show forth *your* praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in *you* to fail; all which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*