

8117:9/83

**AMERICAN BAPTIST
RESOLUTION ON SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE**

We proclaim that separation of church and state is central to our American heritage; that it has made possible a measure of freedom not previously achieved under any other system; that it is indispensable to our national policy of equal rights for all religions and special privileges for no religion.

Church and state are separate not only in their functions, but also in the source of their financing. Government being under public control is properly financed by taxation. Membership in religious institutions and organizations is voluntary, and therefore should be supported by voluntary contributions. We believe that the use of tax money for support of religious groups is in opposition to the spirit and letter of the Constitution.

We declare that this principle does not mean that the state is indifferent to the church, nor that the church is unconcerned for the state. It means rather that church and state are separate in their institutional life and that neither controls the other.

Therefore, in order to maintain the principles of separation of church and state, we recommend to the churches a larger interest in the work being done by the Baptist Joint Committee. We also urge our people to assume wider leadership in their local "ecumenical" and interfaith organizations, and to cultivate relationships to maintain these principles with respect to local issues.

Furthermore we affirm that public education is the birthright of every American child, and that support of such public education is the responsibility of every American. We observe that such support is as indispensable to responsible citizenship as support of public roads, public welfare, police protections, and other obligations of society as a whole.

We recognize the right of churches and other organizations and groups to establish private schools in the interest of spiritual, moral or other objectives which they believe cannot be accomplished satisfactorily within the framework of the public school system. We insist, however, that the support of such private schools is solely the responsibility of their respective constituencies and is in no way a public obligation. Nor does such support diminish the shared responsibility of Americans to provide for public education. We object strenuously, therefore, to any proposal that the public be taxed to pay for the special sectarian or other purposes for which particular groups establish private schools.

We call upon our churches, educational agencies, colleges and universities, and parochial schools to study thoroughly their own present involvement in and relationships to the state and tax funds. We urge disciplined thought, study and action to maintain clearly the principle of separation of church and state and to withstand the dangers that tend to blur and then compromise this historic American and Baptist position.

We object strenuously, therefore, to any proposal that authorizes taxes or borrowing power be used to make grants or loans to sectarian or church related schools. We emphasize that the use of government finances in support of any sectarian purpose is a violation of basic religious liberties for it coerces citizens to support religious objectives which many of them cannot conscientiously approve.

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POLICY BASE

American Baptist Policy Statement on Human Rights

As American Baptists we declare the following rights to be basic human rights and we will support programs and measures to assure these rights:

1. The right of every person to choose a religion freely, to maintain religious belief or unbelief without coercion; the right for communities of faith to meet together to engage in public worship, to witness publicly to others, to speak prophetically from religious conviction to government and society, to live out religious beliefs, and to be free from governmental intrusion, coercion, and control in the free exercise of conscience and religion;

American Baptist Policy Statement on a Statement by American Baptists Concerning Freedom

For Baptists the word 'freedom' is a watermark. It is impressed into our doctrine, our polity, our practice. It cannot be eradicated. Baptists, mindful of Roger Williams' pattern, have endeavored in all kinds of political and religious climate to maintain a continuing witness to the principle of liberty and conscience. Baptists have always asserted that

religion and government are foundations of the social order, that they are indispensable to each other, that they influence as well as complement each other. It is a function of democratic government to safeguard the soil in which religion may grow and flourish freely. It is a function of religion to bring truth, strength of character and conscience to society, so that it may be fit to govern itself. For these reasons state and church must remain separate, each free under God to perform its special function.

4. We reaffirm our allegiance to the historic principle of the separation of church and state;

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