**Faith Versus Politics:**

**Arguing for the Moderate Separation Between Church and State**

By Jonathan Harsh

When it comes to issues and relations between members of the LGBT community and the U.S government, the public opinion has shifted dramatically from the past, although each side still makes their arguments clear. For an individual that identifies as homosexual or transsexual, they see themselves as wanting the same right to services such as employment or marriage as others whom identify as straight, but on the other side they would argue that allowing same-sex marriage is in violation of their religious beliefs or allowing those whom identify as trans-sexual into the bathroom they feel comfortable in (despite their biological sex) is an issue of what is decent in our society. Even today we see examples of the type of legislation in individual states & counties that can be argued one hand to protect religious freedoms but other sides would say these kids of bills actually deny protection of members of the LGBT community from discrimination.

The country is currently focusing on states like North Carolina and the legislation it recently passed that prevents non-discriminatory laws from being passed at the local level (also making people use the restroom registered to their biological sex). However, a larger example of religious ideology overtaking the legislative process is a current law recently passed by the Mississippi state senate (HB 1523), which states, “…public employees, businesses, religious organizations and social workers will not face repercussions for denying services to people based on “sincerely held” religious beliefs. [[1]](#footnote-1) The bill itself is meant to protect specific religious themes, including 1) marriage between a man and a woman, 2) sexual relations should only occur within a heterosexual relationship, and 3) biological sex cannot be changed. [[2]](#footnote-2) The issue being brought up here with recent legislation is that should religious ideology have a place in determining laws being passed or not? Better yet, what role should religion play in a society and how much autonomy should it be given?

From the early years of the Greek and Roman civilizations, where members   
of the populace and the state made no effort to disguise their faith in the gods they felt dictated their lives, to the revolutionary period of the 18th century, where the position of God in a society was questioned by philosophers and rulers alike, the debate of religion’s place within a society has raged on for as long as faith and society were pillars for humanity. Over the years, a number of philosophers and theorists have given an idea of religion’s true purpose within the state: the Roman philosopher Plato sought using faith and belief in the gods within his famous book “The Republic” to keep people from deviating from their intended path; while others like John Locke saw the need for a strict separation between the two institution to prevent one from overtaking and interfering with the other. Even today, the debate between Religious Minimalism and Religious Freedom remains an important topic of discussion within our country and the world overall.   
 In a sense, however, religion is more than just a set of scriptures and prayers to one God or another, but rather it is an institution that helps to develop a sense of community and morality within people. Based on this, the view within this paper will argue that the proper division between church and state must be an area between strict separation between church & state and a complete blend of the two, where individuals are able to practice their own religious beliefs without obstruction (as long as they are not harmful to the beliefs, or ability to practice said beliefs, of others), while a sense of a central religious ideology within the state would be preserved without favoring one religion over others. To come to this conclusion, it would be beneficial to first observe the writings of past philosophers to uncover the origin of certain views on the proper level of separation. Next, it would be important to look at texts relating directly to the United States and how our own idea of separation has changed from the 18th century up towards the present. Finally, we look at how both ideas can be utilized to create a moderate separation that involves educating citizens of the states through how religion can teach morality and love for one another that reflects love and devotion towards the state.

European philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau’s famous novel*, “The Social Contract,”* details weather a proper political entity can exist outside the state of nature (life before modern society) that serves the general will of the people within the state, and one of the more controversial parts of the book is on religion and how Rousseau feels to best to keep it separate from the state, but less so than through strict separation. [[3]](#footnote-3)He discusses three ways types of religion that may exist within a society: The first, “The Religion of Man”, develops without religious structures or physical landmarks (churches, synagogues, mosque, temples, etc.) and thus the belief and worshiping of the divine remains within one’s privacy, “the purely internal cult of the supreme…natural divine right or law.” [[4]](#footnote-4) The second, “Religion of the Citizen,” describes a single religious ideology followed by the state with its own set of ceremonies and scripture that all must follow according to the dogma. Lastly, the third devises two separate forms of rule by both the church and the state (two rulers, two sets of legislature, etc.) that are jointly enforced by the rulers of each sphere.

The famous novella “The Republic” by the philosopher Plato primarily focuses on valuing the pursuit of knowledge and justice within his proposed city-state Kallipolis through its rulers, the Philosopher Kings, and though it does not look at religion directly, there are passages that suggest Plato’s views on religion used in the state. In particular, he addresses the usage of the Noble Lie, or he calls the “Myth of the Metals, to discuss a way to keep the people of the city-state from questioning their reality and to only focus on their own positions, and so offers a tale where the gods created all men and women with a certain type of metal inside their souls, and which type of metal they had determined their place within the society. In addition, Plato voices his disdain for poetry later in the book and expresses his desire to censor unapproved types of writing within “The Republic,” which is shown as evident based on this quote where states, “…we must supervise the makers of tales, and if they make a fine tale it must be approved…we’ll persuade nurses and mothers to tell the approved tales to their children and to shape their souls…” [[5]](#footnote-5)

Erwin Chemerinsky’s article, “*Why Church and State Should be Separate*,” examines the argument for strict separation between church and state. In the piece, Chemerinsky argues that religion ought to remain out of the public sector and out of the control of government (instead opting for a secular, non-theocratic system of governing) and so argues, through three main arguments (with which I will go more into depth later on) in regards to the Establishment Clause (written as part of the first amendment of the constitution, the clause states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” [[6]](#footnote-6) [[7]](#footnote-7)

A more present-day look at this issue of separation between the church and the state is explained in the book “A Wall of Separation: Debating the Public Role of Religion”, co-authored by Ted G. Jeller and Mary C. Segers, which explores both the positive and negative repercussions of religion within the state. Jelen’s piece within the book, “*In Defense of Religious Minimalism,* Ted Jelen argues that governments ought not to hold religion as favorable in answering human questions within the political discourse over other human notions/public issues (race, region, ethnicity, science, etc.) as it prevents proper discussion amongst people on said issues In short he believes that although there must be multiple perspectives on issues that should be valued and acknowledged, there must always be a common ground everyone can agree upon.

On the other hand, with her own individual piece “In Defense of Religious Freedom”, Mary C. Segers, brings up how the basis of religion has been utilized in both positive and negative ways as well as explaining how the Constitution of the U.S does not actually define a religion nor does it explain what it means by free exercise of religion or the establishment of religion In addition she criticizes Jeler’s view on religion being a source of dissent in politics and how both cannot work with one another, while favoring the view that religious ideology manages to assist and enhance democratic values and ideologies within the United States. [[8]](#footnote-8)

One last source of modern input for this issue of separation is Michael Walzer’s piece “*Drawing the Line: Religion and Politics*.” Within his essay, Walzer feels that there must be thee requirements for a separation between church and state: 1) a divide between the two groups, so that the state has coercive power while the church has none (except through pressuring citizens and followers), which he feels would prevent the government from favoring one religion over other and so all sects of faith would receive recognition and support equally, [[9]](#footnote-9) 2) allowing for acts of civil religious in public but separate from political acts/holidays, which would allow for the state to not favor one religion over another and yet the state wouldn’t be forcing one to not be able to practice their faith, as Welzer calls it, “…a sense of mutual engagement amongst the citizens…” [[10]](#footnote-10), and 3) accepting all political positions and arguments on the state side as well, so that it may too work with religious beliefs that too accept and tolerate one another. In Walzer’s view, the proper world is one, “where God’s word carries no special authority…but citizens are free to proclaim the word if they know it…”[[11]](#footnote-11).

I. Old-World Philosophy:

These have been more modern approaches to interpreting the divide between the church and the state, but examples from more famous philosophers might be needed in order to show the importance for a moderate separation between the two institutions.

Rousseau explains his content and dissent for all three kinds of religion that he states within *The Social Contract*: he feels that the “Religion of Man” is able to preserve an individual’s desire to practice one’s own religion privately and free from dominance from the state and from others, but the fear is that one would grow to admire the divine more so than preserving and defending the state. As he puts it, “having no relation to the body politic…it has the effect of taking them away from all earthly things.” [[12]](#footnote-12) “The Religion of the State” seems to follow a more theocratic type of government as he sees one whole state-guided religious dogma as able to teach one to love and dutifully serve the state and follow the laws created by the Sovereign. However, he is supportive of the idea of the state using deceit and tyranny to enforce one type of dogma onto the entirety of a population, which would inevitably lead to violence and bloodshed towards those within the state not as supportive along with those outside the state that feel differently and those whom feel no pull towards the divine (vis-à-vis atheists). [[13]](#footnote-13) He doesn’t even acknowledge the third type, as he feels twin spheres of influence operating side by side creates a scenario where people are unable to follow the laws proposed by both. So instead he theorizes a combination of the first two kinds of religion mentioned: His preferred society would be ruled through a Sovereign having power over the state and policies within a community without having control over what is worshipped by the members of the state, thus allowing for an individual freedom to worship one’s faith however one pleases. But a critical notion of this would have each citizen follow a “Civil Religion” where the dogma in question has them declare their faith in “…a mighty, intelligent…Divinity…foresight of the life to come…sanctity of the social contract and the laws.”[[14]](#footnote-14) In other words, Rousseau requires the political entity in question to have citizens of a state declare their faith in a God and an afterlife as well as adhering to the laws of the state. Through this, no government power interferes with one’s ability to practice one’s own faith (so long as it does not conflict with the wellbeing of the state).

This almost seems to be an accurate representation of what my own ideas of what can be considered a moderate separation between the church and the state, as it seems to create the ability for one to follow their own freedom of religious study (so long as it adheres to the wellbeing of the state and the ability of others to follow their own faith) while keeping the state and political process separate. Also the idea of a civil religious ideology where all must declare belief in a God and an afterlife seems to create a mesh of love for the state while at the same time it not being a heavily biased system that restricts one might wish to follow. Though a significant issue is of Rousseau’s favoring of violence towards those not devoted to the state ideology as well as atheists, and well as the idea of a sovereign existing in our country today that controls the state and the religion: in Rousseau’s mind the sovereign was a collection of all members of the state acting together to create laws, but today it cannot be that simple, as laws are created by those that we appoint not by us collectively. I’ll return to this issue later on and discuss how it can possibly be applied to our own way of life here today.

If the balance between separation of the church and state exists on a spectrum, than Rousseau’s example might be closer to the middle of the two in terms of separation. In this case, Plato’s interpretation of religion within the state might exist on the side favoring a blending of the two institutions. Though the piece doesn’t involve itself too far into religion and its bond with the state, *The Republic,* does bring up the idea of the noble lie. For example, those born with gold souls were destined to rule as philosopher kings, “…but the god, in fashioning those of you who are competent to rule, mixed gold in at their birth.” [[15]](#footnote-15) If one were born with silver in their soul, they would be assigned to the role of an auxiliary, or a defender of the state; and finally those born with bronze or iron were destined to be farmers and craftsman. When questioned about this by those listening to him, Socrates, voiced by Plato, instills that one would make the people believe that the state would collapse should this order be broken, or will be, “…believing that there is an oracle that the city will be destroyed when an iron or bronze man is its guardian…” [[16]](#footnote-16)Basically Plato endorses the idea of falsifying a tale that God created all people as they should be within the class structure of his city-state, as to prevent questioning and have all work towards the betterment of a community.

In regards to poetry, he accuses famous poets Homer and Hesiod as composing “false tales for human beings…and they mustn’t be spoken in our city…” [[17]](#footnote-17) Though this does not relate entirely to religion, the idea here is that Plato sees these types of poetry written by Homer and other poets like him as spreading false tales that can corrupt the faith of others within the society by writing about heroes and gods in a negative manner. This almost seems to echo Rousseau’s second type of Religion, where one faith is accepted and followed by all without exception, and false tales and noble lies are spread to quell the masses into performing one position within the state without questioning it. In addition, a fierce intolerance towards other methods of thinking, such as with tales written by poets, would be criticized as being false representations that others would attack because of what is being censored by the rulers of a state. This is a kind of religious ideology that cannot be replicated today and shouldn’t, as it values using religious deceit and intolerance to force loyalty to the state.

II. Religious Separation in the United States

To look back towards the spectrum of separation between the church and the state, the following example would move one closer towards the side favoring strict separation of the two, in that one has no authority over the other. Within this view lies English philosopher John Locke, who’s liberal ideological beliefs would help form the basis of the U.S Constitution and many of the rights and freedoms we express even today. Early on, in 1698, he wrote a letter to his friend Philipp van Limbroch, proposing toleration to religions thought to quell fears of religion overtaking the state. In his letter he addresses the need for the commonwealth to ensure civil interests (life, liberty, property, and wellbeing of citizens) be passed along to those within the commonwealth by the civil magistrate and ensure they wish for the sanctity of the state to receive said interests. [[18]](#footnote-18) The power over the souls of the commonwealth should not belong in the hands of the civil magistrate or any government power, says Locke, because God cannot appoint a single man or group to instill His teachings onto others and enforce faith into said God and that the civil magistrate’s power focuses on outward authority (control over civil interests) whilst the inward authority remains with God and is entrusted to each individual to profess their faith to Him and the salvation of their soul into the belief of their religion (lying outside the power of the government). [[19]](#footnote-19)

This seems to mirror Rousseau’s first type of religion in that the state and the church are separated and would allow for a freedom for one to follow their own religious beliefs without interference from the state, and so the government would focus on outward powers rather than the internal ones given to each individual within the state. This idea was heavily expressed by our founding fathers and even became part of the U.S Constitution, more specifically the notion that the country cannot favor one religious ideology over another. In a reply letter written in 1802 to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut, where the Association discusses their fears of that the ability to practice their own faith was being obstructed upon and not assisted by the legislature at the time, then-President Thomas Jefferson enforced his view that according to the Constitution and the Establishment Clause (added in 1798) could not give favor towards one religion or another and that said legislation,

“…should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between Church and State…” [[20]](#footnote-20)

Based on this, it seems clear that Locke and Jefferson, alongside other members of the founders, favored a “strict separation” between the church and the state where those of faith could be left to their own faith while members of the government could focus on outward control of the state. This isn’t as radical as Jelen’s ideas of Religious Minimalism, but it does seem to echo keeping religion out of sight and only within one’s sphere of privacy. Rousseau’s fears can be mirrored here, in that there is a chance that inward faith and belief in private could quell love and loyalty away from the state and thus religion would draw men and women away from the physical world (and the state) and towards the mental and spiritual realm of their faith in God.

Moving forward towards the present, we can once again look at Chemerinsky’s article, which seems to take an approach similar to Jefferson and Locke by using the Constitution to justify a strict separation between the church in the U.S and the state through a series of views offered in The first view on the establishment clause is through strict separation, in that the article states religion should remain a private activity within one’s home or within religious institutions (churches, mosques, synagogues, etc.). Basically, the argument is that by keeping church and state separate within our country, the people are able to practice and favor any religion they chose to practice (again, aligning with the first amendment) without the government favoring or dismissing one over others. The second view is that the Establishment Clause within the first Amendment is meant to keep the government neutral in terms of religion, instead opting for secularism over religious favorability for one system of belief over another. The third view argues that we ought to tolerate and accommodate government and religion, plus the former’s support for the latter, and that the only way the government may violate the Establishment Clause is if it forces religious participation in one practice over others.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Further along, Chemerinsky argues that we ought to look at more modern times to fully support the Establishment Clause and the separation of Church and State, stating that the diversity of religions within our country today, outside of the Christian faith, goes along with the notion that supporting one religion over all others could make those of a different faith as outsiders or outcasts (in regards to the number of immigrants in our country today along with refugees of different faith).

In regards to this view, there should be a form of separation, but perhaps that a huge extent might be cumbersome, as the notion of religion is essential to our own society in the U.S, and perhaps religion wouldn't be controlled by the government or vice versa, but perhaps issues of morality, justice, or even good vs. bad are tools used by religions to help educate the masses and maintain a society. So perhaps division is necessary to keep the two institutions operating freely, but perhaps one can use religious ideals to teach people to love the state and serve said state (but at the same time making one vigilant on wrongdoings (not blind loyalty but rather respecting the institution of the state and knowing when It can improve).

Looking at Jelen’s piece, we can see similarities into the argument as to how religion can produce an issue of ideology entangled in legal procedures. For instance, Jellen notes how he feels religion can actually affect the constitutional structures/means of deliberation (specifically, the legislative branch utilizing debate and taking arguments made by Congressional members and committees to determine the proper legislative to utilize) and seems to believe that religion would have people take on one perspective of a topic and disregard all other stances on said topic (one way to govern, one way to value life🡪 no abortion, no to gay marriage etc.). Citing the first amendment, he discusses how free press and free speech guarantee that people should be informed of different perspectives on issues, and based on this can make their own decision (seems like Jelen sees Religion as taking one view point based on religious doctrine and blocking out all other means because it is against “God’s value” [[22]](#footnote-22) (“if religious values are allowed to trump civil political processes, they can undermine the common ground on which policy judgments can be justified publicly.” [[23]](#footnote-23)).

It can be understandable where Jelen is coming from here: the idea that religion can trump politics and essentially dictate how people live based on the doctrine of one faith or ideology over others, or rather halting one’s rights (such as marriage) based on a faith that does not accept it. In that case one might say that is not acceptable as you are forcing two people (two humans not related by blood) whom love each other to not enter into marriage because a scripture says that marriage can only be between a man and a woman. Religion should not subvert the rights of people, but at the same time Religious Minimalism can be harmful since you are forcing people of faith to not practice their religion openly and that in itself is a violation of their right to practice said religious ideology.

With a contrasting view, Segers’ argument sees her believing that a complete withdrawal of religion from political society to the extreme minimal amount has not/nor should ever happen; in fact she compares that idea of religious minimalism to the Soviet Union’s treatment of religion (destruction of religious institutions within the country). In addition, Segers cites how religions institutions were able to inspire historical social reform for women’s suffrage (feminist groups reinterpreting Christian scriptures to support equality between women and men), civil rights (African-American churches spreading support for the Civil Rights Act of 1964), and even antiwar (Catholic and Protestant groups protesting the Vietnam War due to violations of their faith through war) movements during the late 19th and early to mid 20th centuries. As Segers points out in the piece,

“These moral reformers were not deterred by notions that religion is a private matter between the believer and…God…Instead they drew inspiration from religion to work towards social improvement.” [[24]](#footnote-24)

This seems to fit closer to the idea of moderate separation than Jelen’s piece, mainly because his chapter endorsed keeping religion as restricted within the community as possible, whereas this chapter keeps the argument of a separation at heart while also proving the usefulness of religion both at the individual and state levels. Plus she brings up points on how in our own country, there might not be many institutional divisions between the church and the state and that religion might have a role within our society but should also be separated from the political process. Having said that, she does also show how faith allowed for a teaching of morality and justice within followers of faith, leading to a number of social movements to improve the community and the country overall.

This even goes along with what Walzer was stating in his own piece, that he suggests a more moderate interpretation of the separation between the two institutions, since it actually shows ways to keep the institutions separate and yet find a way for them to coordinate and connect through the good of the community overall. In addition, having both the political and religious figures in the state coordinating with one another (both inside and outside their own areas of control) could be a way to ensure a compromise by both so they can work together while allowing for a practice of faith independent to each person. [[25]](#footnote-25)However, his notion of having God’s word meaning no special kind of authority might be an issue to those who believe in the almighty, seeing it above the institution of the state, and might foster resentment due to this. Perhaps the best solution it to use religion to teach those to respect the laws implemented as a morally sound path one can take. One can interpret religion as the betterment of man as faith in God (by any religion), which would mean helping the state overall rather than isolating oneself in a shell of faith from the rest of the community. Religion can be a means for the state to foster goodwill and respect for one’s community, and through educating on a sense of what is morally right or wrong example, it can create an atmosphere of toleration.

III. Morality, Education, and the Issue of Separation

Based on the input from philosophers and writers from both the past and the present, the most ideal system of the separation between the church and the state aligns with Rousseau’s views but also dabbling into Seger’s input on religion in the state: Rousseau had the right idea of combining the two types of Religion (the Religion of Man being argued by Locke, with the Religion of the Citizen being argued by Plato) and combines them to where the state’s leadership would not have any power over the faith or religions (protected by their right to profess their faith) and as long as these ideologies did not go against the good will of the state or the ability of others to practice their own religion, they were allowed their own space to practice. In addition, they must follow civil religious dogma where they believe in an afterlife, a God, and the values and rules of the state.

An issue that can be brought up here deals with atheism, the lack of belief in God. One could argue that professing the central belief in a higher power (shared by all religions) would be against their own interpretation of the world and the idea of a divinity, in that they wouldn’t believe in one or not as deeply as others. Both Rousseau and Locke expressed the need to punish anyone whom did not profess to a God, for then they’d go against the state itself, and so the issue is how to apply to those whom do not believe. A possible solution is to interpret these “rules” of Civil Religion as more of a series of guidelines that have to be enforced: to those who wish to practice their religion in peace they must adhere to the wellbeing of the state (which can be accompanied by belief in God and the Afterlife) and perhaps to those not of the faith can also follow said guidelines, in that they must accept and tolerate views that ideals that others would possess but not outwardly express in public or through the state. The idea is that religious belief alone would not outwardly dictate the civil religion proposed but rather the views of different faiths create a way for common schools of thought to exist that allow for different interpretations (as long as they are not seen as intentional in the prevention of one’s ability to practice their own beliefs).

With Segers, it can be added that religion cannot be outlawed completely, as it will always have a place in our society, but just not outright governing the state itself. However, she does agree, as do I, that believers of a faith should not build a “wall of separation” that prevents discussion within the public sector and should try and apply their practices in a general way when discussing their own views on the state (without overtaking one or another). The practice of a specific faith should not be mandatory for those living within a state, particularly those registering as atheist, but maybe another way to interpret it is the idea of this ideal that strives for all peoples to follow their own faith while respecting those around them. [[26]](#footnote-26)

Another possible argument to this solution lies contrary to the previous one, in that those whom follow their own faith with a fierce devotion might see as this appeasement towards other religions as a restriction on practicing their own religion in the way they desire. We have seen examples of those whom take extremes to their own religious beliefs, from radicals within the Islamist faith spreading a campaign of fear to submit their own religion over others (through groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda) and those even within American history that took Christian faith to extremes (KKK, Westboro Baptist Church), to laws passed that reflect a single ideology of religion over all other notions of governance (Sharia Law, anti- black or anti-LGBT legislation, etc.). In this aspect, I feel that Jellen was correct that religious ideology completely ruling legislation subverts the ability to have a proper discussion and instead focuses solely on the faith chosen. [[27]](#footnote-27)

Getting back to the example of gay marriage, the argument could be made that the law currently passed in Mississippi places a priority of preserving religious beliefs of the Judeo-Christian faith, but should this even be possible or acceptable? Under the solution of a moderate separation, I would like to think it wouldn’t since this is one ideology being placed above others through the use of legislation.

Therefore, I feel that no type of legislation or governmental actions relating to, or impacted by, religion or any type of religious ideology ought to be allowed (gay marriage and discrimination against the LGBT community cannot be outlawed based on religious grounds, for example). But for issues regarding marriage or sexuality (incest, pedophilia, etc.) the state would need to create laws that would ban such practices but not on the grounds of religion but on the issue of morality (morals upheld by the civil religious ideology members of the state must follow). Morality and religion would work hand in hand to ensure the faith of all those within a state protected without favorability towards one or another. The idea is to look at what is considered proper and sound within a society, and such practices ought not to be allowed as they are actions that end up being harmful to those around them (pedophilia impacting the livelihood of children, incest leading to lifestyles that are ultimately negative on the health of all those involved).

Getting back to the idea of morals and education, each system of religious ideology have different methods of expressing ones faith (from prayer, ceremonies, physical locations of worship, and so on) and with those different morals some might teach for others to learn. But with the ideas expressed in certain faiths (the 10 commandments for example) that teach right from wrong, perhaps what should be done is not dictating people strictly on what individual religions teach, but rather find common ground with how to act in a way towards your own religion while learning to respect and acknowledge other faiths within the community. This way, we can learn to love and respect one another and our own choices in faith and decency. The idea is to look at commonality amongst religion, and how a moderate interpretation of scripture can create several common ideas that promote love for one another as well as devotion towards the state and an acceptance of the different views and ideas each individual has. As simple as it sounds, the idea is to take religions and see what makes them, and all of us, similar and from there a central belief (similar to the central divinity proposed by Rousseau) that may be established to teach one another how to coexist with different beliefs (as long as said beliefs respect another’s ability to practice a different faith).

One final issue that was brought up in the beginning regards the idea of a central sovereign being present in *The Social Contract* that was made up of all citizens within the state and would have equal part in creating laws for those within the community. Today we are not fully governing ourselves, but rather our democratic system has us elect officials to lead us and create systems and institutions meant to better and protect us as well as the state we live in. So perhaps we cannot have a Sovereign-type body within the United States as envisioned by Rousseau, but perhaps another way to view a sovereign can stem from our ability to choose the leaders that represent us that exist already, and so through them the collective “divinity” would be enforced. Also to note, this wouldn’t be a favoring of one religion or another and it’s not forcing religion per se onto those not following or believing in religion, but it’s more a state of mind that acknowledges the different views people have on different faiths.

In short, through this: 1) atheists acknowledge that religion exists in different forms and beliefs without having to follow a specific religion (nor is one chosen for the entire state), 2) people may be able to practice their faith without obstruction by another or by the government (as long as their practicing of a certain faith does not obstruct another’s ability to practice their own beliefs and doesn’t seek harm against members of the state, and 3) the central “divinity” would be a ideal enforced by members of the government that do not favor a specific religion but acknowledgment that there is belief amongst members of the state of a divine being and that certain actions can put you in heaven or hell, so through this one can educate others on how to act morally in a society where they respect the opinions of those around them and work towards the common good of all others as well as the state itself.

In our country today, the debate rages on how much power religion has within the state, and vice versa, and thus this debate on the separation between the two is still as important than as it was back in the days of Rousseau. This country may have been founded on Christian ideology, but still the idea of a Constitution that allows for a non-favorability towards any religion is still the best path to pursue when respecting freedom of speech, specifically freedom of religion. As the examples have explained, there exists a spectrum that ranges from Religious Minimalism (Jelen) to complete Theocratic systems where religion is used to govern the masses (Plato), and so Rousseau’s ideas seem to fit the closes when it comes to moderate separation, though with the change of creating the civil religion as a guideline rather than laws (though it can be left up for interpretation, so that religious communities can see it as belief in a divine entity, and some like atheists can interpret it as structure that allows for respect towards others’ rights to practice religion without being forced to follow one). Overall, we cannot have a system where religion governs all decisions made within a society, and yet religion cannot be stamped out and restricted to one’s domicile. Religion has a place within the state, but there must be a clear moderate divide to ensure both religious and political freedom for all those within a state. Through finding how these separate schools of thought can find a moral commonality, it can bring us a step closer towards a better society and a more prosperous world overall. I admit I don’t know that it will lead to this or not, but I think to being observing separation in such a way can be a first step in the right direction

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