

National Black Church Initiative

P.O. Box 65177
Washington DC 20035
202-744-0184
dcbci2002@gmail.com
www.naltblackchurch.com

Rev. Evans presented a speech on separation of church and state in Philadelphia, February 1st, 2013 in front of the Philadelphia Bar Association.

Below is the text of his speech.

Good afternoon,

I am very happy and delighted that you have invited me here to share my thoughts on the issues surrounding the separation of church and state.

I'd like to thank the host committee who has organized this most important event and Professor Marcie Hamilton, who is my friend and my co-laborer in the fight to make sure that all victims of sexual violence find justice and, so far as the church is concerned, find mercy and love from the Almighty God as they deal with this dramatic time in their lives.

The church and state doctrine as implied in the Constitution – although not explicitly written in the Constitution – is one of the most clever uses of a democratic tool toward a just society. It is probably the most misunderstood doctrine in the United States, today. Since the medieval period of Europe to this present day in American democracy, we continue to define this doctrine within the context of this democracy. It is an ever-evolving doctrine and cleverly misapplied by both the state and the church depending upon what issues are being argued at the time.

For instance, this Sunday, we will celebrate the Super Bowl and for those Christians who ask God for their favorite team to win is a clear misuse of the church's role. Likewise, when Chief Justice Ray Moore of the Alabama Supreme Court insists that the Ten Commandments should be prominently displayed in the courthouse and argues as a justification that it is part of his religious tradition is equally as wrong as the state insisting that the Church should not have any say-so in the abortion debate or the same-sex marriage debate or in the Nativity displays during the Christmas season. The church endorses Justice Moore and his insistence on providing some religious context to his faith even when he is working for the state. Whether we like it or not this clever tool of trying to separate the church from the state in the American context has only complicated the issue.

The black church believes that the Scriptures are right here, that those of us in the church should pray and sometimes aid the State in serving humanity, but never to bow to the state in overlooking our biblical principles or religious etas.

The church clearly recognizes that society is becoming secular in nature. Based off of the Pew charitable trust survey in religion, sixty percent of Americans no longer adhere to or respect church doctrine, especially on controversial issues like abortion and same-sex marriage. But does that mean that the church should give in to the majority of its parishioners? It cannot give in. We answer to a separate authority, which many of you accept is higher than the state, the authority of God and, for us Christians, Christ Jesus.

What the church is saying to the state today is that we will not allow you to usurp or minimize the authority of the church, even if in some cases that alienates some members of society. Here, we are not talking about the rights that the individual inherits from the state like our homosexual brothers and sisters. As Americans, they can do whatever they want. What the church objects to in the same-sex marriage debate is that the state refuses to recognize the authority that the church has over marriage. Marriage is one of the issues that the state and the church agreed upon for over two thousand years. Our constitution is based upon protecting the minority and everyone would agree that the homosexual community is a minority group. In seven states, including the District of Columbia, it is legal to marry someone of the same sex. In the 43 other states, it is illegal to marry someone of the same sex. The Supreme Court has been asked to rule on the validity of the state anti-same-sex statutes. The church agrees with the state in this case and the 43 states because they uphold and re-enforce biblical teachings on the meaning of marriage as defined by society and the knowledge of the church.

President Obama has decided to define his presidency on the stance that same-sex marriage is constitutional even though federal law under the Defense of Marriage Act says that same-sex couples cannot enjoy the same benefits under marriage as heterosexual couples. This is the first time that a president has voided federal law, openly. Now the Supreme Court will rule on whether same-sex marriage and DOMA is constitutional.

The church will respect the ruling of the Supreme Court because the Bible tells us to respect civil law. But many churches may, after the ruling, continue to defend what they deem is their faith tradition which is to deny same-sex couples the recognition of marriage.

On the other hand, the church has violated civil law by sexually abusing tens of thousands of children all over the world. This is both the Protestant and the Catholic churches and the church has consistently covered up these crimes. The National Black Church Initiative has consistently called for a federal investigation of the church and, concerning the child abuse cases in the Protestant and Catholic church's traditions. This put the church in a precarious position. On the one hand, the church vehemently opposes giving up its authority to the state over the issue of marriage between a man and a woman and the vast majority of the church is moving with all deliberate speed to argue the separation of church and state.

On the other hand, the church has victimized the children of its own congregations and repeatedly covered up these violent acts against children. Some in the church argue that there is a clear

demarcation between church and state here and especially in criminal law and the church in some civil proceedings is arguing for that recognition to lessen the civil penalties for child abuse cases. But the vast majority of the church is arguing in favor of the state and its use of the racketeering laws to stop, punish, and exact penalties from the church which has perpetuated this violent abuse on God's most vulnerable segment of humanity.

This leaves the church at a moral impasse in the use of the separation of church and state doctrine. Just like the church, the state cannot argue when it is convenient for them to do so. If they are going to apply this doctrine, it has to be applied equally, but as we stated before, this may be an impossible doctrine to apply equally because of the complexity of our democracy. We will continue to struggle at achieving a balance in separation of church and state, I believe, until the Lord comes. Therefore, we believe that there is no separation between church and state when it comes to issues that clearly threaten the power and the authority of the church and the state.