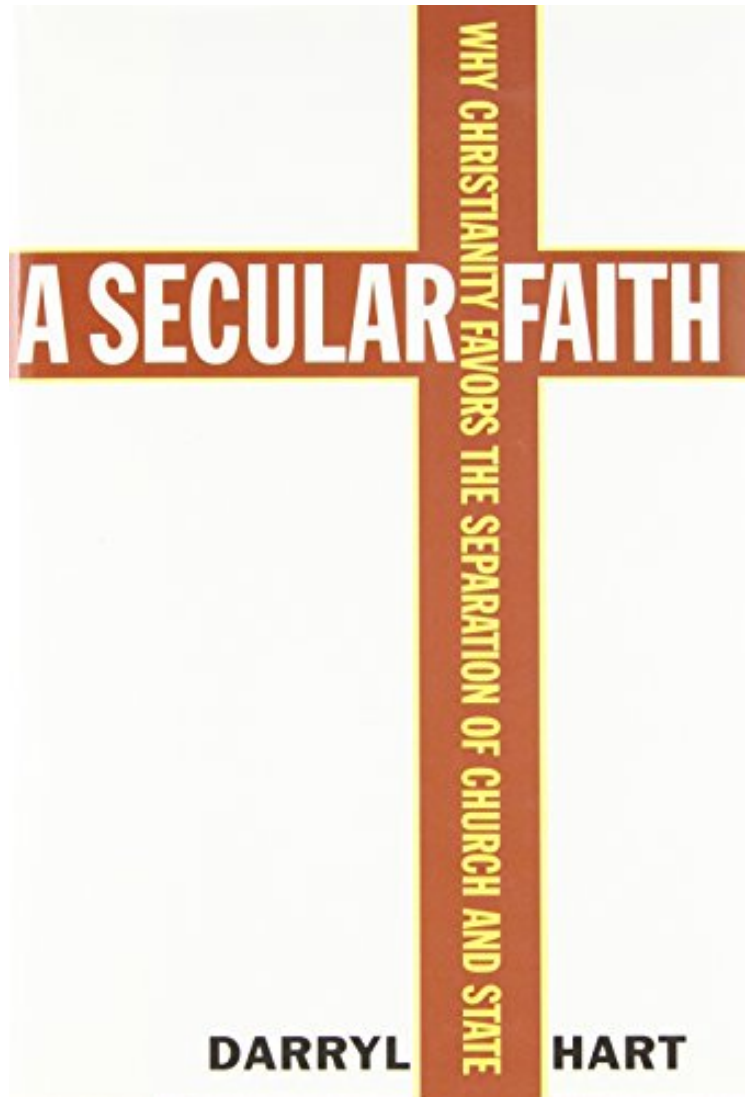


(Get free) A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State

# A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State

*D. G. Hart*

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**D. G. Hart : A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State:

10 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Anachronistic with disastrous applications By the frenchman This book is an extended, and laborious (for the reader), discourse that asserts Christians ought to live double lives. If you are looking for a well-researched book attempting to bolster a 2-Kingdom view similar to the likes of Michael Horton,

R. Scott Clark, and David Van Druen; you will get a book articulating the paradigm with a transparency the aforementioned lack as Hart attempts to baptize bifurcated Christian living as if it were obedience. For this transparency, Hart is to be commended. For Hart, Christian faith must be relegated to the private life and should not be worn on the sleeve. Any breakdown of the privatized faith silo may result in confusion of the two kingdoms (at best), or actual harm to others (at worst, and more likely). Outside of formal worship settings and your home-made bunker, faith is dangerous. Its in these settings that damage control can be used most effectively. As Hart reasons: The love of God, tenacity about worship, defensiveness about sacred rites, aversion to false religion - all are parts of genuine faith that make it impractical if not damaging for public life. (pg 13) Throughout the pages of the book, Hart crafts an American history where faith has regularly intruded upon the secular realm and argues that we should, instead of integrating faith throughout our lives, hyphenate our faith. So we need not be concerned about public policy. On its face, that sounds not terribly wrong. We dont want the Church writing policies, do we? Of course, talking about public policy is not limited to paving roads: what about infanticide? Hart never takes the time to ponder what a Christian must do when the secular intrudes upon the sacred. Hart fails to distinguish Church from faithful Christian witness as well. Piety is typically equated to external forms of worship in the Lords Day setting. Completely absent is the notion of faithful witness in relationship to two kingdoms. John the Baptist addressed Herods unlawful marriage (by Jewish standards). One ponders why an obvious New Testament scenario like this was absent from the book. Did John the Baptist die needlessly? He was a preacher of the kingdom, so one would expect that the man who paved the way for Jesus ministry would have been included. Unfortunately, the preacher of the kingdom didnt meet Harts primary concern. The logic Hart employs is strained. On the one hand, we dont live in a theocracy, and we should not try to impose one. Im not sure how many Evangelicals are actually trying to do this. Who is the target these arrows are aimed at? Theres no clear target, so the reader is left wondering if Hart sleeps with a flashlight worried the bogeyman is lurking beneath his bed. As a result, Hart envisions a secular kingdom based on his understanding of particular passages of Scripture to keep the theocratic bogeyman at bay. Ironically, by basing his contrivances on Scripture, he unwittingly affirms a strange form of theocracy. A hyphenated one. In conclusion: I recommend the book to readers desiring to see the errors of radical two kingdom views. Hart fails to provide citations in the book, although he offers a word on the sources he used at the end. The book reads like a reconstructionist history loaded with anachronism. Perhaps including citations would have curbed this strong tendency. The result is helpful, however, since it tends to demonstrate that Harts two kingdoms view is a private one where he attempts to reconstruct history to agree with him while imposing it on the rest of us. To this end, we are thankful for the transparency, but also ask that Hart keep his hyphenated theocracy to himself.

8 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Desperately needed; wonderfully clear  
By Anne Rice  
We need this book right now. The arguments in America of 2007 over church and state are approaching delirium. We need Hart's well informed, well documented and decisive approach to the question. This is one of the best books I've seen on the issue, and one that is especially meaningful for Christians. Also recommended: the works of the great historian Mark Noll. --- anneobrienrice@mac.com

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful. An Interesting Approach  
By M. C. Andwood  
Original, thought-provoking and oftentimes controversial, Darryl Hart's book, *A Secular Faith: Why Christianity Favors the Separation of Church and State*, presents a new perspective of the proper boundaries of the Christian Church in the political arena of the United States of America. Hart ardently supports the strict separation of church and state and he presents this much-debated topic as a study of the negative effects of American politics on the Christian religion, rather than the negative influence of religion on politics. Offering a rebuttal to those conservative Christians who believe the secularization of American society heralds its downfall, Hart declares that this secularization is saving Christianity from being misemployed and trivialized by supporting political agendas. Hart assumes that Christianity is an apolitical faith whose realm of authority only concerns the personal and private matters of salvation for Christians. Christianity has no role in political machinations and its public advocacy is not necessary for moral or good government. Reiterating the Augustinian conceptualization of the City of God and the City of Man, Hart argues that politics should focus on the material and physical world and the church should focus solely on the spiritual Kingdom that is to come. Christianity, he posits, relates only to the spiritual realm and therefore cannot inform the organization of society, such as the endorsement of a certain polity, or sanction government programs, such as social-welfare reform. Christians, he believes, are called to live perpetually hyphenated lives in which they constantly struggle with their identities and responsibilities as Christians and as citizens. However, Hart makes a distinction between the individual social action that Jesus asks of his followers and official church support of political social justice programs that seemingly destroys the transcendent quality of Christianity. The book contains nine chapters, each analyzing a facet of the relationship between church and state in American history. Hart provides thorough historical context, illustrates the various interpretations of each issue and proposes his argument in comparison to previous opinions. Hart discredits the supposition that the fundamental ideas of liberty and rights in American democracy were rooted in Christianity, specifically New England Puritanism and Calvinism. He maintains that Christian denominations had no political motives and that religious principles were not integral to the basis of American government though they had a definite influence on society. He denounces the revivalist movements for their blatant endorsement of democracy that crossed the line between the responsibilities of

church and state. In his analysis of more recent examples, Hart discusses parochial education controversies and criticizes the compassionate conservative movement for tying Christian duty with political activism, thus replacing the church's higher spiritual duties with the more mundane and ultimately less important matters of the material world. Since his opinions counter the social teachings of numerous Protestant denominations as well as the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, Hart admits that his ideas are more suggestions than assertions. Therefore, he does not defend the theological basis for his suggestions, since other Christian denominations base their counter-arguments on different doctrine. Though unorthodox, Hart's new perspective is strong enough to contend with the previously established views of church and state and worth serious consideration.

Darryl Hart, the highly regarded historian of religion, contends that appeals to Christianity for social and political well-being fundamentally misconstrue the meaning of the Christian religion. His book weaves together historical narratives of American Protestantism's influence on the nation's politics, and commentary on recent writing about religion and public life, with expositions of Christian teaching. The tapestry that emerges is a compelling faith-based argument for keeping Christianity out of politics.

From Publishers Weekly In this fascinating, well-documented historical exploration of religious expression in American life, Hart (*The University Gets Religion*) argues that while religion has long had a voice in the public square, its current influence is extraordinary. Hart moves smoothly back and forth through American history as he traces the substance of debates over America's providential role, religion and public education, what it means to be a nation "under God" and the dream of a unified national faith. His discussion of the 19th-century rise of anti-Catholicism and the evolution of Roman Catholic attitudes toward involvement in American political life (as exemplified in the campaigns of Al Smith and JFK) is particularly engaging, as is his critique of the current enthusiasm for "compassionate conservatism." Evangelicals have not only lost the idea that churches had a singular spiritual role, but have also surrendered the notion, argues Hart, "that the churches' task is ultimately more important than the state's." One only wishes that he could have made a stronger argument for his central premise—that the claims and character of Christianity mean that believers living in a democratic state must balance, not confuse and conjoin, their dual sets of duties, both as pilgrims and citizens. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist "My argument is that the basic teachings of Christianity are virtually useless for resolving America's political disputes," says religious historian Hart, and he demonstrates how nine familiar American concepts anent church-state relations confound Protestant doctrine, in particular. As a conservative Protestant, he declines to speak for Catholicism, but at least one major common doctrine proves vital throughout. That is Augustine's distinction of the holy city of God from the secular city of man. Christians are perforce citizens of both, but their only specifically Christian obligation concerning secular citizenship is to ensure that the laws do not injure faith and its practices. Hart cites Jesus even more frequently than Augustine to distinguish constitutional freedom of religion from specifically Christian freedom, to show why nineteenth-century Catholic bishops correctly objected to Bible reading in the public schools, to discriminate the individualism basic to democracy from the corporate identity required by the church, and to expose "compassionate conservative" policies, such as Bush II's faith-based initiative, as non-Christian. Although demanding to read, Hart's argument is blazingly enlightening. Ray Olson Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved Darryl Hart's thoughtful, witty, and challenging book...could hardly be more pertinent today. (Wilfred M. McClay, University of Oklahoma) Read, re-read, and ponder this timely and provocative book. (Mark A. Noll, Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at University of Notre Dame) This stunningly good book is not about the United States Constitution but about the mission of the City of God. (R. Laurence Moore, author of *Touchdown Jesus: The Mixing of Sacred and Secular in American History*) Hart makes a powerful Christian case for the separation of church and state. Even secularists should appreciate Hart. (Leo P. Ribuffo, Professor of History at George Washington University and author of *The Old Christian Right*) The fact that Hart's viewpoint is so unique today measures the shallowness of the public conversation on this crucial issue. (Michael Horton, Ph.D., J. Gresham Machen Professor of Systematic Theology and Apologetics at Westminster Seminary California) [A] fascinating, well-documented historical exploration of religious expression in American life.... Engaging. (Publishers Weekly) A valuable contribution to the discussion of church and state.... those with ears to hear, let them hear clearly. (Terry Eastland *The Weekly Standard*) Offers the single best critique of the religious right's involvement in politics. (Alan Wolfe, Director of the Boisi Center for Religion American Public Life at Boston College *New Republic*) Hart provides a much-needed religious and historical perspective on the relationship between Church and State in the United States. (*Library Journal*) Although demanding to read, Hart's argument is blazingly enlightening. (Ray Olson *Booklist*) He makes a strong case for reemphasizing the otherworldly element in Christianity. (*National*) A Catholic reader will benefit from Hart's summaries of historical studies. (James Likoudis *New Oxford*) Presents a unique and valuable contribution to make sense of the inherent tensions between church and state. (*Journal of Church and State*) Fascinating, well-documented historical exploration of religious expression in America...engaging. (Publishers Weekly) The best book I can recommend right now on the separation of church and

state.... (Anne Rice)Since Hart meets his stated goal of trying 'to complicate contemporary understandings of the relationship between Christianity and liberal democracy in the United States,' perhaps people should do as I had to do: read it twice. Darryl Hart has written a brilliant book. (Rick Quinn New Horizons)Highly nuanced....Offers a sobriety test for intoxicated cultural warriors by challenging...assumptions about the nature of church and state. (JOHN R. MUETHER Ordained Servant)A significant contribution to maintaining the integrity of both church and state. (RICHARD M. GAMBLE Ordained Servant)Hart says...Christians can and should accept a secular liberal state without compromising their prior commitment to Christ. (Barry Hankins Journal of Southern History)Fascinating, instructive, and challenging. (Journal Of Interdisciplinary Studies)A more nuanced take on Church and State than what's found in most other recent volumes on the subject. (Daniel McCarthy, [www.toryanarchist.com](http://www.toryanarchist.com))