



# opinions

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**JEWISHLIGHT**

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## JEWISH LIGHT EDITORIAL

# Antidisestablishmentarianism

Remember how cool you thought it was that a word could be that long? Think about how many grade school kids take on the challenge of spelling this 28-letter beast.

It's a classic case of form over substance, though. For neither the students who take on that admirable task, nor their teachers, typically take the time to focus on the origins of the word or its meaning.

As it happens, the meaning is incredibly relevant to things that are going on in the United States today. Most notable among them: elections, sermons, the Internal Revenue Code and Service, and Supreme Court cases. The consequences of the public discussion may have long-lasting repercussions for American culture.

The "A Word," as we'll call it, refers to the ideology of those in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain who were against separating church and state. The sovereignty of the heads of state was inextricably linked to the Church of England, and popular movements advocated for detaching the link, while others supported its continuance. The opposition to the link wasn't uniform. Some wanted the separation because of religious oppression directed at some minorities; others favored distance between religion and government; still others pined for the days prior to the Reformation when the Catholic Church held sway with the Crown.

It's not bringing a theological or moral perspective to public conduct we object to; in fact, we laud it. But the noticeable trend in today's marketplace of ideas is one of religious institutions asserting their positions of authority to force political outcomes in elections. It is a disturbing practice, to say the least, and one that is being put forward as a shield against government intervention in religion when in fact it's being used as a sword to promote specific candidate outcomes.

The United States government, acting through the IRS, prevents tax-exempt institutions from supporting or opposing candidates. However, the IRS dam is crumbling, as leaders of an estimated 1,500 religious congregations around the country have chosen to openly defy the IRS with the support of a group called Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) that since 2008 has promoted its pre-election Pulpit Freedom Sunday. So far, the IRS has not asserted itself against the violators.

While the purpose of the IRS rule was initially political and not religious, the challenge to it in the context of today's world — where there's no shortage of other ways to support or oppose a candidate beyond the walls of worship — is troubling indeed. Anyone who belongs to a

congregation can choose to support the candidate of their choice directly, or through a candidate campaign, or through a political party, or, since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, a SuperPAC. Another vehicle is most definitely not needed.

The seeming result desired by those who oppose the IRS rule is to have a place of captive audience and a person of substantial moral authority to hammer home the vote. But is this the way that Americans largely want to live their spiritual lives? We don't think so. Consider this excerpt from an article by David Sessions on *The Daily Beast* website this week. Talking about the ADF's movement (which is primarily targeted to conservative evangelicals), Sessions writes:

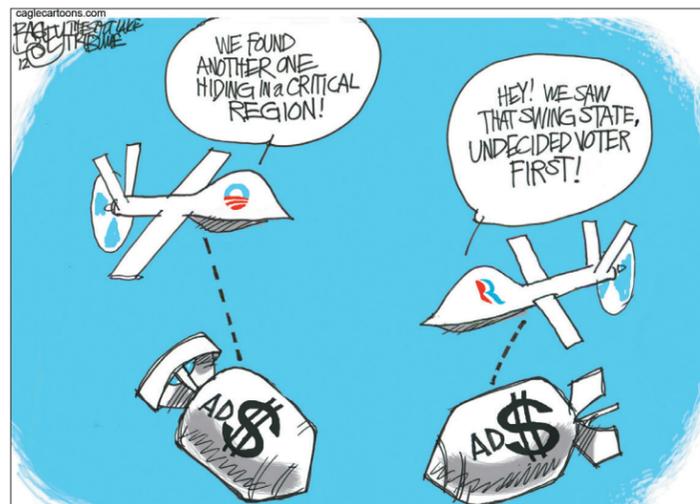
"In reality, there are simply not that many pastors or churches interested in getting involved in political campaigns. It's true that conservative evangelicals are one of the most dedicated voting blocs, but their political organization is often exaggerated. On the ground in evangelical churches, explicit political talk carries the risk of being divisive and alienating, two things that are deadly to most churches' goal of getting as many people as possible into the fold."

While the abuse of the pulpit for electioneering has primarily been true of evangelical and conservative pastors, it must be said that clergy of all political stripes, including rabbis, have created discomfort in their congregations by appearing to encourage support of particular candidates prior to elections. If it is wrong for Christian clergy to do this, it is equally wrong for Jewish clergy to engage in partisan politics from the *bima*. The wall between church (and synagogue and mosque) should be "high and impregnable" so as to protect religion and politics from being comingled inappropriately.

Yes, we all have political views, and as informed citizens we should. Yes, we all see the necessary connection between our moral, ethical and religious views and how we define social progress. There's nothing wrong with that. That's very different, however, from dividing us all into little political and candidate-support blocs based on where and how we pray. There's a lot wrong with that.

Next time you have the "A Word" rolling around in your head, think about what it really is, what it really means, and how we can best achieve and maintain the respective roles of government and religious institutions without either being rolled by the other. We know from history that the United States of America does not need a Church of America. Let's hope we're not heading in that direction.

Submit letters to the editor to Managing Editor Mike Sherwin at msherwin@thejewishlight.com. Letters may be edited for grammar, length and clarity. Letters should be no more than 250 words. Please include your name, municipality and a daytime telephone number. The *Light* will publish only one letter from an individual writer during a 60-day period. Anonymous letters will generally not be considered for publication.



Pat Bagley, Salt Lake Tribune/Cagle Cartoons

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Days gone by

I grew up in the "Jewish Ghetto" of St. Louis. It was a really nice, quiet place to grow up in. When I became a teenager I got a job at the Chicago Delicatessen, 5709 Easton Avenue, part of the Easton line business district. Corned Beef was \$1.25 per pound. I worked there for three-and-a-half years. I remember the first lot was a gasoline station, selling gas for 12.9 cents a gallon. The next store was Jennie's dry goods store. Then came the butcher shop and then Kram's fish store. Also in that same area was Komen's Bakery.

Those were the days when families were close and almost everything they needed or wanted was within walking distance. Families today live far apart, sometimes not even in the same state. The closeness is no longer there. It's a real shame that these days are gone by.

Leon Klearman  
Chesterfield

### Yiddish — and Yenglish — lesson

*Shalom Chaverim* (Hello friends). *Ah gitten yoor!* (a good year!)

Contrary to what speakers of Yenglish think: When members of my congregation enjoy the light buffet before the weekly *Shabbos*, we are not having a *nosh*. That is an appetizer course, a *for-shp'eye'zeh*, a spicy something before [the main meal]—like *gefilteh* fish or *gehahktech leben* / chopped [chicken] livers that precedes the brisket and *tzimmes* / slow-cooked, and mildly, sweet stew or casserole mainly of carrots.

Incidentally, it was not part of the Yiddish culture conveyed by my parents who grew up, pre-war, in towns northwest of Lodz, Poland to make *ah groyseh tzimmes*, meaning a big fuss (as is required for carrot stew), by pronouncing food as delicious or to-die-for! But if the *for'shp'eye'zeh* is tasty, it is *b'tampte*.

As might become obvious if you attended Nusach Hari's Yiddish Club which meets monthly on first Thursday evenings: In true Yiddish, a *nosh* is a sweet treat. As a verb, to *nosh* is to eat sweets—excessively.

*Shue'im* / peace and *ah'bei gezind* / most important: health!

Elaine K. Alexander  
Creve Coeur

## JEWISH LIGHT POLITICAL POLICIES

**POLITICAL COVERAGE:** The St. Louis Jewish Light covers political campaigns, and neither supports nor opposes candidates in any way. We report campaign news in as balanced a way as possible. We may publish political analysis, opinion pieces and letters from independent authors that do not reflect the position or viewpoint of the Jewish Light, and in doing so we endeavor to provide a balanced variety of viewpoints and perspectives.

**POLITICAL ADVERTISING:** The Jewish Light runs political advertisements that are paid for by third parties. We offer political parties, candidates and their supporters equal opportunity to purchase advertisements. No political advertising reflects endorsement of or opposition to a candidate by the Jewish Light.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The St. Louis Jewish Light will not publish letters to the editor or commentaries about the 2012 presidential elections after the October 24 edition. The deadline to submit an election-related letter or commentary is 9 a.m. Monday, Oct. 22.