

Michael D. Peabody - “The Impossibility of Imposed Love: Separation of Church and State and the Formation of a Truly Loving Society”

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Societies throughout history have attempted to use government as a vehicle to forge loving cultures. Some attempts, such as the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire during the Middle Ages, brought church and state together to compel citizens to worship and love God with the hope that they would consequently love each other. In the 20th century, in response to abuses inherent in imposed religion, some atheist and secular societies viewed religion as obstructing love between citizens and imposed secular socialism. In either case, utopian societies that attempted to impose concepts of religious agape love or its secular analogue on the people from the top down soon retracted into societies where suspicion and distrust replaced the founding concepts and resulted in the formation of authoritarian regimes.

In my paper, I will examine top-down secular and religious attempts to impose utopian qualities of love on societies and compare them with the American form of liberty of conscience, as influenced by Roger Williams who championed the separation of church and state which was later adopted by Thomas Jefferson, and how the resulting legal rubric differentiates itself from previous societies by promoting property rights, concepts of free enterprise, self-determinism, and individual openness to God which the paper will argue fosters an environment in which a truly loving society may flourish.

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