Separation of Church and State is NOT in the 1st Amendment (or anywhere else in the US Constitution)



Christine O'Donnell

I know very little about Delaware's Republican senatorial candidate, Christine O'Donnell. But a recent article in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com [1. I'm including a link to the Sun-Sentinel article, which I assume will go dark at some point in the future] caught my attention. The article mocks Christine O'Donnell for not knowing that the First Amendment contains a requirement for the "separation of church and state." Never mind, of course, that Ms. O'Donnell is correct.

> *O'Donnell became a favorite target for Democrats who see her as too shallow, too conservative and too inexperienced to be a senator. Video clips of her past statements have become the butt of cable and late night television talk shows and she was forced to begin one campaign ad with a denial that she was a witch.*
>
> *The latest debate was before an audience at Widener University Law School in Wilmington, Del. In an exchange over whether creationism should be taught the same way that the*

> *theory of evolution is presented, Coons said that "religious doctrine doesn't belong in our public schools."*
>
> *"Where in the Constitution is the separation of church and state?" O'Donnell asked Coons as the audience laughed.*
>
> *He said it was in the 1st Amendment.*
>
> *"Let me clarify," O'Donnell continued. "You're telling me that separation of church and state is in 1st Amendment?"*
>
> *"Government shall make no establishment of religion," came the reply.[2. South Florida Sun-Sentinel.com, by By Michael Muskal, Los Angeles Times, 1:28 PM EDT, October 19, 2010]*

But it turns out that the so called doctrine of separation of church and state is NOT in the Constitution. In fact the First Amendment to the US Constitution says this about religion:

> ***Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.***

History attributes the origin of the concept of "separation of church and state" to the famous letter of Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptist Association. The Danbury Baptist Association was concerned about rumors that government would establish a state religion. Thomas Jefferson assured them this was not the case. Government ought not establish any religion. Unfortunately, many misinformed people think that our Federal Constitution provides a right to freedom **FROM** religion, rather than freedom **OF** religion. It is an interesting perversion of pop media[3. This false premise is also widely promoted by many politicians and members of the public education establishment], which holds that a doctrine intended to protect my right to worship how I see fit, is transformed into a theory that I can only worship God if my worship doesn't offend society's most easily offended members.

Please, whatever you do, don’t surrender your religious freedoms without a fight!

FOOTNOTES