

Gamwell's basic point about the meaning of the First Amendment—and thus his basic criticism of "the separationist view"—I should myself want to formulate as follows, thereby closely tracking, if also, at points, departing from, his own formulation toward the conclusion of his essay, "On Politics as a Christian Vocation" (22).

The First Amendment is nothing more or less than expression of a commitment to the way of reason also in matters of religious or existential belief. Disestablishment of religion and the prescription of religious freedom require, in effect, that a full and free discourse among the plurality of religious or existential beliefs actually represented in the nation shall never be compromised by the government. Informed by such discourse, the government legislates and administers specific laws and policies. But it is never allowed to limit the discourse by itself teaching or supporting the teaching that a particular belief about the comprehensive purpose of human life is true.

On this understanding of the First Amendment, in contrast to the separationist understanding, Christians have no reason not to pursue politics as a Christian vocation, provided only that, precisely as Christians, they are free to do so democratically, by the way of reason.

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