

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF  
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS  
PRESS RELEASE 926**

**Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King, An  
Advocate Of Church-State Separation**

DOGS are advocates of separation of religion from the State because entanglement of religion and the State are

**Bad for religion**

**Bad for the State**

**Bad for public education**

They are not against religion. A person's belief system is a central part of their very being. But they are wary of the dangers of mixing religion with the lust for wealth and power. The current state of education funding in Australia is evidence of the effect this has upon the opportunities and well-being of large numbers of our children.

Contrary to the public face of many religious people in Australia – and America - not all Christians favour entanglement of church and State. In recent weeks Americans celebrated the birthday – and achievement- of Dr Luther King.

King was a committed Christian, a pastor of the Baptist church, but he was a strong church State separationist. It is a pity we do not have more of his kind in Australia. In remembering him, Rob Boston, of Americans United for Separation of Church and State has this to say.

[Rob Boston](#)

King was no advocate of partisan politicking in the pulpit. While King, a Baptist minister, spoke powerfully about issues of racial justice and equality from pulpits, he didn't see the need to hand out candidate endorsements in church. The late U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), who worked with King in the '60s, pointed out several times that King did not electioneer in church.

During an Oct. 1, 2002, debate on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, Lewis said, "Ministers who led the civil rights movement did not select political candidates and operate

our churches like political action committees. Although their churches and leaders faced violence and hatred for their efforts to protect human rights and human dignity, they were free and even protected by the Constitution to speak out on these issues. At no time did we envision or even contemplate the need for our houses of worship to become partisan pulpits.”

King also did not support the Religious Right’s attack on reproductive rights. He was an advocate of family planning. For his work on this issue, King in 1966 was given an award by Planned Parenthood in recognition of his support for being a leader in the fight for reproductive justice.

Accepting the award on his behalf, King’s wife, Coretta Scott King, [read a statement from King](#), during which he cited the Black community’s “special and urgent concern” over family planning issues.

King supported the Supreme Court’s decisions striking down government-sponsored prayer in public schools. King was asked about this issue during a January 1965 [interview](#) with *Playboy* magazine written by Alex Haley. King not only backed the high court’s rulings, but he also noted that his frequent nemesis, Gov. George Wallace of Alabama, stood on the other side.

“I endorse it. I think it was correct,” King said. “Contrary to what many have said, it sought to outlaw neither prayer nor belief in God. In a pluralistic society such as ours, who is to determine what prayer shall be spoken, and by whom? Legally, constitutionally or otherwise, the state certainly has no such right. I am strongly opposed to the efforts that have been made to nullify the decision. They have been motivated, I think, by little more than the wish to embarrass the Supreme Court. When I saw Brother Wallace going up to Washington to testify against the decision at the Congressional hearings, it only strengthened my conviction that the decision was right.”

King would have been highly skeptical of the Religious Right’s crusade for teaching creationism and “intelligent design” in public schools. King saw no need for religion and science to fight. *Strength to Love*, a collection of King’s sermons, contains this [King observation](#): “Science deals mainly with facts; religion deals mainly with values. The two are not rivals. They are complementary. Science keeps religion from sinking into the valley of crippling irrationalism and paralyzing obscurantism. Religion prevents science from falling into the marsh of obsolete materialism and moral nihilism.”

In one of his most famous passages, King reminded Americans of the different roles religion and government play in society.

“The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state,” King observed in a sermon that was also published in *Strength to Love*. “It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.”

Christian nationalists sometimes try to claim King, but he was no friend of their views. Take a moment today and celebrate his true legacy of freedom.

[Rob Boston](#)

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