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November 5, 2011: What is the Origin of the Separation of Church and State?

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Title: What is the Origin of the Separation of Church and State?

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11/5/2011—In a sense, the separation of church and state goes back to the Two Cities of Augustine or even Jesus' admonition to render to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God (except that Jesus probably thought everything belonged to God). But the modern doctrine of separation probably goes back to the Reformation. As the story is told by James Reston, Jr. in his book, *Defenders of the Faith*, the Lutheran movement created the Augsburg Confession in June, 1530 in preparation for the Diet of Augsburg. The last article of the Confession was the separation of civil authority from church authority—"[T]he power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded." Pretty clearly this article represented more than a theological commitment. There was a good chance that the Emperor, Charles V, would use military power to crush the Protestant movement and reimpose the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany. The appeal to the separation of church and state was an attempt to preempt such an action. It is true that such a mixing was felt to threaten the purity of the Church. But more important, the power of the sword should not be used to impose theological uniformity. The separation of church and state was, from the start, a protection of conscience.