

Reflections on the Interrelationship of Religion and Politics

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Abstract: *Religion and politics have a long history of interaction, and there may be genetic or social ties as well. They are substantially related. However, a lot of people seem to think this relationship is disgusting, absurd, or against the law. The relationship between religion and politics is a topic on which many people have strong views. For some, the connections are commendable, acceptable, and even essential to the survival of democracy and civilized society. Others see any religious influence on political life as fundamentally immoral, irrational, unconstitutional, and hostile to democracy, taking into consideration a variety of issues. Each viewpoint has some merit. To encourage a bit more tolerance, less anger, and maybe even communication across the chasm that divides these radically divergent opinions, my objective is to swiftly investigate the rationale(s) behind such opposite viewpoints. Even with even a superficial examination of these elements, skeptics need to be convinced that there are significant, significant, and significant connections between politics and religion.*

Keywords: Theology, Governance, Spirituality, Ideology, Faith, Democracy, Religion, Politics, Morality, Secularism

I. INTRODUCTION

History, sociology, and maybe even biology have all shown how intertwined politics and religion are. They are substantially related. However, a lot of people seem to think this relationship is disgusting, absurd, or against the law. The relationship between religion and politics is a topic on which many people have strong views. For some, the connections are commendable, acceptable, and even essential to the survival of democracy and civilized society. Others see any religious influence on political life as fundamentally immoral, irrational, unconstitutional, and hostile to democracy, taking into consideration a variety of issues. Each viewpoint has some merit. To encourage a bit more tolerance, less anger, and maybe even communication across the chasm that divides these radically divergent opinions, my objective is to swiftly investigate the rationale(s) behind such opposite viewpoints. Even a cursory examination of these elements ought to convince skeptics that there are significant, basic, and vital connections between religion and politics that call for deeper research.

Religion's Positive Contributions to Political Life:

There is probably some validity to the criticism that religion is a separating factor in political life, that it creates intolerance of others and hence encourages disagreement rather than cooperation. This hasn't always been the case, however. In the thick of severe clashes over integration in the South in the 1960s and 1970s, conversations and the beginnings of reconciliation were sometimes sparked by the efforts of ministers in white and black congregations to promote racial harmony. Opportunities for healing that would not have otherwise existed have surely been made possible by the prospect (if not the practice) of worshiping together and holding similar religious beliefs. It is clear that such dialogue and efforts to bring about peace constituted political action in the sense of bridging a significant divide inside the democratic system.

Such incidents help to emphasize how religions may encourage a sense of brothers and sisterhood among people from quite different financial backgrounds. There is ample evidence from rural areas, mixed neighborhoods, "mega-churches," and mosques to support the idea that this reality does, at least sometimes, occur, even if it isn't usually the

case (poor and rich districts often have their own congregations). When the creeds affirm that all persons are created equal in God's sight, they often aim for this "leveling" of the population. As theorists and philosophers as diverse as St. Augustine and Rousseau have understood, such teachings have political implications. Because of that, even Glenn Tinder once questioned, "Can We Be Good [Politically] Without God?" in a well-known piece from *The Atlantic Monthly*.

In actuality, endeavors to advance politics and society have often been founded on religious beliefs. The life and work of the assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr., which we have celebrated nationally, is one of the most powerful examples. He served as an excellent illustration of how religious leaders affected the civil rights movement. But he was only one of many Christian opponents who led the struggle against slavery and its contemporary analogue, segregation. Numerous listeners were persuaded by these preachers—both black and white—that slavery and later segregation were violations of God's law or sin on their part. Slavery was eventually abolished as a result of such Christian tenacity and leadership—peacefully in Britain, brutally in America.

Additionally, it is clear that religion has served as a catalyst for resistance against oppression, something that secular critics of religion often overlook. Few of the thousands—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Pope John Paul II, and Archbishop Tutu among them—have been able to convince the hopeless that good will finally triumph against what seems to be an unbeatable political evil. Churches undoubtedly contributed to the anti-communist feeling that spread across Eastern Europe. It is equally obvious that they were instrumental in putting an end to apartheid in South Africa.

The notion that religion ought to have such a large influence on society is rooted in the age-old traditions and beliefs that there are duties placed on people that are higher and more binding than the proclamations and pretenses of regional kings. The higher law tradition of religious superiority over the secular political order has existed at least from the time of the Old Testament. The conflicts between Moses and Pharaoh, Samuel's rebuke of Saul, Nathan's condemnation of King David's adultery, and Elijah's battles with Ahab and Jezebel all serve as powerful sermon illustrations on how God's will triumphs over the ephemeral and occasionally self-serving objectives of political powers. The Catholic Church, whose canon law paradoxically served as the basis for a lot other legal systems, developed this habit. The Church itself has been the repository of frequently contradictory impulses toward accommodation and critique of the earthly political order, serving as the spiritual and moral foundation for political orders throughout Europe for a thousand years, resistance to the revolutionary impulses of the 19th century, and a sponsor of such impulses in the "Liberation Theology" movement in Latin America in the middle of the 20th century.

These are only a few instances of how religion has enhanced and elevated the body politic, acting as a catalyst for repressive resistance, a source of harmony and healing, and a reservoir of ambitions for human advancement all in the name of worshiping God. But there is a dark aspect to this bond as well.

Religion's Negative Influence in Political Life

In contrast to some who predicted the "End of History" after the end of the Cold War, prominent political scientist Samuel Huntington predicted that a far older source of conflict would reassert itself in his famed essay on the "Clash of Civilizations." Civilizations were often and strikingly defined by their religious traditions, although not being the same as religions. Huntington predicted that conflicts between the Hindu-Indian and Buddhist Civilizations, the Roman-Catholic/Protestant West, the Orthodox Christian Slavic East, the Islamic World, and Confucian China would all serve as sources for future wars, resuming patterns of rivalry and tension that the brief struggle between communism and capitalism had briefly overshadowed. The essay's popularity and remarkable prescience about 9/11 and its aftermath, although being very divisive in academic circles, all contribute to emphasize the continued reality of religion's propensity to generate discord.

Alongside the abolition of slavery, religion has been used to excuse prejudice, persecution, and even genocide. In reality, preachers and congregations issued loud denunciations of "the peculiar institution" in our country while similarly devout churches and pastors shouted heated sermons in support of it. Popes and metropolitans have previously justified the murdering, persecuting, and pogroms of Jews. Ruler Mehemet The Conqueror's 1463-inspired proclamation mandating tolerance for his Franciscan people in numerous Muslim countries and holy sites has since been replaced by a deluge of fatwas and teachings encouraging the slaughter of Jews and Christians in the cause of Allah. One of the most important aspects of conversations about religion and politics in our country is the focus on

keeping church and state apart. It yet substantially matches American skepticism of state churches in European history, despite the fact that there is significant discussion about the exact bounds this puts on church-state interactions. Several religious battles that occurred during that time period lasted for centuries and had terrible effects on the governments and populations involved.

This contends that being aware of religion's fusion with state power is one of the most crucial lessons about religion's impact on politics. Such a partnership has the potential to greatly corrupt both individuals and lead to a path of enormous human misery. The combination of the fundamental human desire for meaning and collective hope imposes a terrible responsibility on those who possess the resulting power. There are many distinct facets to this commitment. To raise, ennoble, and elevate those who place their trust in them in ways that would never cause regret and despair for making that decision, however, is one of its most important, if not sacred, components. To incite people to murder others, often in horrible ways, simply because they adhere to a different understanding of God, is a terrible breach of trust. And it comes from the horrifying presumption that those in positions of power, or those who think they do, "embody" the populace's faith.

The "cure" of separation may be just as dangerous, thus it is advisable to be cautious of any movement that blends religion with secular authority. The decades of atheistic leadership in the 20th Century may attest to the tendency toward ruthless arrogance and terrible results when giving political leaders the authority of a "faith" in and of itself. When Stalin, Hitler, and Mao—along with a number of other lesser dictators—proclaimed themselves to be larger-than-life Deities and declared war on God as an illegitimate enemy, millions of their disposable followers suffered and perished alongside the demigods' "enemies."

If religion has had both effects—both positive and negative—then what are we to conclude about a proper role or link between them?

Some Points to Ponder Concerning the Relationship Between Religion and Politics.

Political scientists have been studying this phenomenon for a while. Numerous truisms or regularities have been deduced from it. One of them is that for democracy to flourish, there must be a robust civil society—a thriving, autonomous sector of public life apart from the control of the state. Such a civic society must find ways to limit the extent to which our differences define us in order to function as the world's greatest teacher of moderation and tolerance. When it comes to teaching people about the universal human values that eventually connect us despite our differences, religion is often an important institution. Religions that fail to do this weaken the basis of civil society and the possibility of political autonomy. They promise to suppress an uprising of self-righteous vengeance in order to preserve that crucial balance and tolerance. Avoid such abomination that passes for religion, please. The typical response must be to see such wickedness for what it is and treat it right by banning and expelling it from the political system.

There will likely be an argument made that doing so would contravene fundamental legal prohibitions and tolerance norms, particularly those expressed in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. There is nothing more untrue than that. Without reciprocity, tolerance would just be submission. Nothing in the Constitution or the law obligates anybody to comply with the demands of a murderer, whether they are actual or prospective killers. The height of arrogance is to call for tolerance while refusing to practice it, while hate groups continue to seek protection and other uninformed supporters continue to demand conformity.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau famously advocated for the adoption of a "civil religion"—a belief system that is supported or promoted by the government—in *The Social Contract* as a required coherence to ensure that the government continues to be the dominating authority in people's lives. This requirement has long been seen as a violation of religion's legitimate role in enlightening and civilizing sinful people, which it most definitely is. On the other hand, it draws attention to how widely acknowledged it is that trusting in a higher power is a necessary element of creating a peaceful community. Thomas Hobbes famously likened the commonwealth to a huge Leviathan, a mortal God, ready to amaze its people. The Old Testament book of Proverbs informs us that wisdom starts with a right regard for God. This may be a sign that humanity is beginning to see its own weakness, need on others, and desire for social support as being greater than the sum of its problems. While certain faiths have desired to become the earthly incarnation of the everlasting God, governments have sometimes attempted to reduce the impact of that God in the lives of their citizens, often under the

cover of avoiding religious disputes. Both demands are really perversions. A secure settlement of the conflict is, in my opinion, neither feasible nor desirable. It seems that mankind needs both the prophetic and the profane, which are essentially at odds with one another, in order to work out its salvation and sustain the potential of political and personal perfection. History teaches us that theocracies and authoritarian atheists are bound to fail in their efforts to reduce tension. In conclusion, I believe the discussion about how politics and religion should interact should continue. Since concerns may be brought up and replies can be debated, rejected, or accepted, we live in a free society, and democracy continues.

I'm a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, sometimes known as the "Mormon" Church. The Church exposes important religious ideas in a Pageant every summer at the Hill Cumorah outside of neighboring Palmyra, New York. Every summer, during the show, obscenely violent demonstrators hurl derogatory insults at both audience members and performers. I find their acts to be both perplexing and disgusting as a Christian. However, as a citizen, I am grateful for the opportunity to live in a society where such disputes are still a possibility and am relieved that it still does.

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