

THE ALTERNATIVE

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Dear Reader,

We return in this issue to a topic that has been dealt with several times before: the relation between politics and religion. The reason for doing so is that the issue seems to be of increasing importance both domestically and internationally. Since the election of 1976 but particularly during the last two years in the United States the religious connection of the country's opponents and the religious or quasi-religious ideology of the United States have found dramatic expression. A change in U. S. politics was signaled in the 2000 elections. George W. Bush's appeal for religious support was clearly successful. His attempt to shift some government programs to faith-based organizations has been less successful.

This new world has not been good news for political forces that consider themselves liberal and enlightened. A new poll by the Pew Research Center finds that voters who frequently attend religious services vote 63-37 for Bush and those who never attend lean 62-38 for Democrats. We now have the widest gap we have ever had between Republicans and Democrats, said Andy Kohut, the director of the Pew survey. Religion is the most powerful predictor of party identification and partisan voting, said Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution. George W. Bush is a church-going Christian who mixes theology and public policies. By contrast, the leading Democratic candidates for president (with the exception of Joseph Lieberman and Al Sharpton) keep their campaigns secular, seldom mentioning God or religion, or attending church except for an occasional well-publicized visit to an African-American church.

The issue is illustrated by the Supreme Court's hearing on Dec. 2 a case of using tax money to support students attending a Christian seminary. It is difficult to imagine such a case getting to the Supreme Court at almost any time in the past. The New York Times's editorial on Dec. 2 warned about a dangerous lowering of the wall and the next day the newspaper ran a front page account of the oral arguments before the Court. The Times seemed to want to decide for the justices before they even wrote their opinions. The Times's obsession with defending the wall may be understandable but the editors may be missing the religious story in the country.

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A MISPLACED METAPHOR: CHURCH AND STATE

By Gabriel Moran

Religion and politics are closely related in every nation. The relation is not new; it goes back many centuries. In Post-Reformation Europe, each state had to work out its own relation to whichever Christian church was dominant. The European people who first came to North America included many who were unhappy with Europe's arrangements. The history that ensued in the United States has been a peculiar one in which the relation of politics and religion is almost never directly addressed.

The phrase that everyone in this country knows is *A wall of separation between church and state*. Most people recognize that *A wall of separation* is a figure of speech that can be misleading. Less obvious is the fact that *A church and state* is also a figure of speech, a misleading metaphor that has never described either the British American colonies or the United States of America. Instead of a church and a state, the United States is comprised of many hundreds of religious groups, fifty states and a federal government.

The language of church and state is invoked as a blunt instrument to cut off discussion of important issues, such as the teaching of religion in state supported schools. What possible relevance has *A church and state* to schools doing their proper job of studying religion as an important part of human experience? Worse, the language of church and state does not prevent the seepage of religious ideology into the foreign policy of the United States and the high-handed use of religiosity in many local issues.

A current example is the outrageous performance of Roy Moore, until recently the chief judge in Alabama. For years, Moore has exploited the issue of posting the ten commandments in public places. He erected a 5000 pound monument at the court's entrance with (his version of) the ten commandments. His argument that this was not a question of *A church* stood on good logical and historical grounds. The support that Moore receives - overwhelming in Alabama - points up some of the confusion about religion in the public life of the United States.

Jerry Falwell had used an argument similar to Moore's whenever it was claimed that his *A moral majority* organization violated the separation of church and state. Falwell quite logically insisted that his organization did not represent any church. The usual defenders of the state in these cases are *People for the American Way* and the *American Civil Liberties Union*. Their answer seems to be to exclude religious thought and discourse from any part in public life, a stance that wins many court battles but does nothing for intelligent national debate.

While left and right argue over posting the ten commandments, the policies of the United States government embody the religious mission of the country. When George W. Bush was rebuked by Muslims for using the word *Acrusade*, people finally noticed this terrible metaphor but they did not realize that Mr. Bush was simply speaking in the usual way that politicians speak in this country. (Dwight Eisenhower's *ACrusade* in Europe, Billy James Hargis's *AChristian Crusade*, Ronald Reagan's 1966 gubernatorial campaign called a *Amoral crusade*, John McCain's 2000 run for the presidential nomination as a *Acrusade*, etc.).

Wars are usually suffused with religious imagery and language; why else would you go out and kill people you don't know. When the elder Bush launched his war in January, 1991, he said: *It has everything to do with what religion embodies - good versus evil, right versus wrong, human dignity versus tyranny and oppression.* The hyperbole was the temporary rhetoric of a limited war. But now that Bush, the younger, has launched *Aproject eternal war*, such a contrast of good and evil becomes frighteningly apocalyptic. George W. Bush, in his first speech after Sept. 11, 2001 said: *Our responsibility to history is clear: to rid the world of evil.* Any nation that sets out to rid the world of evil has given itself a divine mission. Far from merely being exaggerated rhetoric of the moment, the conflict of good and evil has hardened in Mr. Bush's communications.

In 2001, a group of religious leaders met with Mr. Bush in the White House. They told him that his leadership at this time was part of God's plan. Bush responded: *I accept the responsibility.* It is difficult to say which party spoke more outrageously, the ministers for discerning George W. Bush as God's anointed or Bush for accepting the divine appointment. Certainly, religious leaders ought not to be feeding the inevitable tendency toward grandiose illusions on the part of political leaders. The ministers might have quoted Raymond Aron: *No prince is entitled to make his country the Christ among nations.* When John Kennedy was asked by a group of religious leaders what he wished from them, he said: that you should criticize me. As Confucius said in answer to the question of how to serve a prince: *Tell him the truth even if it offends him.*

A clever politician can channel the religious sentiments of the country behind his religiously spiked language. Laurence Moore notes that *Aclose to a majority of Americans is willing to say that religion is the most important thing in life. Almost no one makes that claim about politicians, even smart politicians.* The intellectual leaders of the country seem oblivious of how important religion is in the lives of ordinary people. Peter Berger has well characterized the United States as a *A society of Indians ruled by an elite of Swedes.* I doubt that there will ever be a serious examination of religion in the public life of the United States so long as the language of church and state dominates the discussion. The full story

of the history of the metaphor of church and state can be found in Philip Hamburger's Separation of Church and State (Harvard University Press, 2002). Here are a few of the highlights of that study:

1. There is nothing in the U.S. Constitution or any state constitution about the separation of church and state. A wall of separation between church and state originated in a letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptists in 1802. The Baptists were complaining about being taxed to support Congregational ministers. Jefferson borrowed the image of a wall separating church and state from establishment ministers who used it accusingly against people they claimed were trying to remove religion from public life. It is notable that the Baptists did not publish Jefferson's letter or ever cite it for support.

2. The language of church and state was popularized in the 1840s and 1850s by nativists fearful of the new immigrants. An attempt was made in 1876 to get a constitutional amendment. Hamburger writes: "With the concept of the separation of church and state, nativists could most clearly exclude Catholicism from the public schools without removing Protestantism. Protestants tended to assume that whereas Catholics acted as part of a church, Protestants acted in diverse sects as individuals." The proposed amendment failed but various versions of the "Blaine amendment" were then adopted by states. The amendment prohibited financial aid to any institution under the control of a religious denomination or any institution where religious doctrine is taught. However, the reading of the bible was explicitly not included in the prohibition.

3. The nativist organization most supportive of church-state separation was the revised Ku Klux Klan. Founded in 1915, the Klan had five million members by 1926. The Catholic church was its sworn enemy. In 1926, the New York Times wrote: "The American people have made up their minds for separation of church and state and they interpret such separation as meaning that no member of the Roman Catholic communion is eligible to the Presidency." Al Smith insisted that he believed in an absolute separation of church and state but to no avail. Later, John Kennedy would be more successful when he appeared before a national convention of ministers to profess that he believed in a country in which the separation of church and state was total.

4. The first clear use of the separation of church and state as the basis of a Supreme Court decision was in the Everson case in 1947. Subsidized busing to Catholic schools was allowed by the Court's decision. The decision written by Justice Hugo Black (whose connection to the Ku Klux Klan had caused a furor among Catholics when revealed in the 1930s) was something of a surprise. Black called it a "pyrrhic victory" for Catholics; the wall of separation was now firmly in place.

5. The great uproar in the 1960s over the Court's exclusion of the Lord's Prayer and bible reading from public schools cannot be understood without the history of what church and state had meant until then. AChurch@had almost always meant Roman Catholic church. The legal solidifying of the wall of separation seemed to shore up the eroding position of a non-sectarian Protestant religiosity in the country. When the Court turned around and applied church-state to the ten commandments, the Lord's Prayer and bible reading, it was experienced as a betrayal. Had not church-state separation always been a protection of the bible in state schools? One must admit that the large part of the country that has never accepted the 1960s rulings has most of history on its side.

Since the 1960s the Court has continued to elaborate in endlessly confused ways a metaphor that was dead when Jefferson first used it in 1802. The Court is not likely to find new language until the academic elite of the country drop their bias toward discussing religion in public life. The usual academic assumption is that religion is an obstacle to thinking and politically reactionary. At the moment when John Kennedy was professing belief in a country where the separation of church and state is total, Martin Luther King, Jr. was marshaling the religious forces of the country to fight the unjust racial laws of the nation. The Civil Rights movement was unimaginable without the influence of religion on politics.

One cannot deny that religion can function as a fuel to incendiary policies of attacking the enemy of the state. But it is also true that when the issue is protest against the militarization of the country or draconian welfare laws, the religious voices are sometimes almost alone. Statesman George Kennan wrote of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' Letter in 1983: AThis paper may fairly be described as the most profound and searching inquiry yet conducted by any responsible collective body into the relations of nuclear weaponry, and indeed of modern war in general, to moral philosophy, to politics and to the conscience of the national state.@

The argument here is not that religion is always good - or even on balance mostly good - for politics. The point is that the United States of America strikes the rest of the world as being drenched in religiosity while the intellectual leaders of the country hide behind a mythical language of the separation of church and state. Thomas Jefferson, who used the phrase, twisting it from its European origins, wrote elsewhere that Apublic authorities are not precluded from supporting instruction in religious opinions and duties.@ Jefferson favored bringing Asectarian schools@ into the university, integrating religious controversy into higher education. When will the United States, especially its universities, finally undertake a serious examination of religion?

KICKING THE SECULARIST HABIT

By David Brooks

For a few years it seemed that we were all heading toward a benign end of history, one in which our biggest worry would be boredom. Liberal democracy had won the day. Yes, we had to contend with globalization and inequality, but these were material and measurable concepts. Now we are looking at fundamental clashes of belief and a truly scary situation that brings to mind the Middle Ages, with weak governments, missionary armies, and rampant religious conflict.

I now get extremely annoyed by the secular fundamentalists who are content to remain smugly ignorant of enormous shifts occurring all around them. They haven't learned anything about religion, at home or abroad. They don't know who Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Johnson are, even though those co-authors have sold 42 million copies of their books. They still don't know what makes a Pentecostal a Pentecostal (you could walk through an American newsroom and ask that question, and the only people who might be able to answer would be the secretaries and the janitorial staff). They still don't know about Michel Aflaq, the mystical Arab nationalist who served as a guru to Saddam Hussein. A great Niagra of religious fervor is cascading down around them while they stand obtuse and dry in a little cave of their own parochialism - and many of them are journalists and policy analysts, who are paid to keep up with these things.

During the centuries when secularism seemed the wave of the future, Western intellectuals developed social-science models of extraordinary persuasiveness. Marx explained history through class struggle, other economists explained it through profit maximization. Professors of international affairs used conflict-of-interest doctrines and game theories to predict the dynamics between nation-states.

All of these models are seductive and partly true. This country has built powerful institutions, such as the State Department and the CIA, that use them to try to develop sound policies. But none of the models can adequately account for religious ideas, impulses and actions, because religious fervor can't be quantified and standardized. Religious motivations can't be explained by cost-benefit analysis.

Over the past twenty years domestic-policy analysts have thought hard about the roles that religion and character play in public life. Our foreign-policy elites are two decades behind. They go for months ignoring the force of religion, then, when confronted with something inescapably religious, such as the Iranian revolution or the Taliban, they begin talking of religious zealotry and fanaticism,

which suddenly explains everything. After a few days of shaking their heads over the fanatics, they revert to their usual secular analyses. We do not yet have, and sorely need, a mode of analysis that attempts to merge the spiritual and the material.

The recovering secularist has to resist the temptation to treat religion as a mere conduit for thwarted economic impulses. For example, we often say that young Arab men who have no decent prospects turn to radical Islam. There's obviously some truth to this observation. But it's not the whole story: neither Mohammed Atta nor Osama bin Laden, for example, was poor or oppressed. And though it's possible to construct theories that explain their radicalism as the result of alienation or some other secular factor, it makes more sense to acknowledge that faith is its own force, independent of and perhaps greater than economic resentment.

Human beings yearn for righteous rule, for a just world or a world that reflects God's will - in many cases at least as strongly as they yearn for money or success. Thinking about that yearning means moving away from scientific analysis and into the realm of moral judgment. The crucial question is not What incentives does this yearning respond to? But Do individuals pursue a moral vision of righteous rule? And do they do so in virtuous ways, or are they, like Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden, evil in their vision and methods?

The recovering secularist must acknowledge that he has been too easy on religion. Because he assumed that it was playing a diminishing role in public affairs, he patronized it. He condescendingly decided not to judge other creeds. They are all valid ways of approaching God, he told himself, and ultimately they fuse into one. After all, why stir up trouble by judging another's beliefs? It's not polite. The better opinion, when confronted by some nasty practice performed in the name of religion, is simply to avert one's eyes. Is Wahhabism a vicious sect that perverts Islam? Don't talk about it.

But in a world where religion plays an ever larger role, this approach is no longer acceptable. One has to try to separate right from wrong. The problem is that once we start doing that, it's hard to say where we will end up. Consider Pim Fortuyn, a left-leaning Dutch politician and gay-rights advocate who criticized Muslim immigrants for their attitudes toward women and gays. When he was assassinated last year, the press described him, on the basis of those criticisms, as a rightist in the manner of Jean-Marie Le Pen, which was far from the truth. In the post-secular world today's categories of left and right will become inapt and obsolete.

GOD AND MAN IN BAGHDAD

By Thomas Friedman

The first post-Saddam democratic government that the U.S. gives birth to in Iraq may be called the Islamic Republic of Iraq - and that's not necessarily a bad thing. In the Sunni and Shiite areas of Iraq, the primary sources of legitimacy, and political expression are tribal and religious. This dependence and respect for religious authority will be reflected in the first post-Saddam government -whether it comes about by indirect or direct elections. Because Shiites make up sixty percent of Iraq, and because the only current legitimate leadership are religious figures, their views and aspirations will have to be taken into account.

There is, however, good reason to believe that Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the most revered Shiite cleric in Iraq and the only one who can claim to speak for Iraqi Shiites as a whole, does not aspire to be a Khomeini. Many Iraqi Shiite clerics have lived in Iran and avowedly do not want to follow its authoritarian path. Moreover, because Shiites are a majority in Iraq, they are the ones with the greatest stake in keeping Iraq a unified state. Given their numbers, any democratic Iraq is one where Shiites, be they liberal or conservative, will have great influence. But to keep Iraq unified the Shiites will have to respect the rights and aspirations of Iraq's Kurds and Sunnis, as well as other minorities.

What is unfolding in Iraq today - a tug of war between Ayatollah Sistani and the Governing Council over how an interim government should be elected - is something inevitable, essential and inescapably messy. What we are witnessing, explains Yitzhak Nakash, is a very healthy bargaining session over what will be the relationship between religion and politics in Iraq and over the process of choosing legitimate national and communal leaders. It is very important that the Americans show respect for the views of Sistani - and let Sistani and other Iraqi political forces thrash this out on their own.

Ayatollah Sistani is not a Khomeini and he does not envision an Iraq ruled directly by clerics. The ayatollah comes from the quietist school of Shiite clerics, who have traditionally attempted to shield themselves from politics. In demanding elections, he's obviously looking out for Shiite interests, but he's also insisting that the new Iraqi government be as legitimate and stable as possible.

If things go reasonably well, the result will be an initial Iraqi government that is more religious than Turkey but more democratic than Iran. We must not try to abort this unfolding discussion among Iraqis. In fact we should be proud of it. Our job is to make sure there is enough security for this critical discussion.

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