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**Democracy and Religion:
Are They Compatible?**

**Peter W. Sperlich
The University of California
at Berkeley**

**Prepared for presentation at the XVth World Congress of the International
Political Science Association
August 21-25, 1994
Berlin, Germany**

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DEMOCRACY AND RELIGION: ARE THEY COMPATIBLE?

I. DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

At least three of the words in my title need clarification: democracy, religion, and compatibility. The last is the easiest. The other two need more extended discussions. I use compatibility in a practical rather than logical sense, employing it to indicate that the processes and actions of one entity do not interfere with, limit, or injure those of the other. Democracy and religion, then, are compatible if neither one obstructs, impedes, blocks, or harms the free and full operation of the other.

To anticipate my conclusions, democracy (as yet to be defined) is entirely compatible with mainstream religion. It guarantees the free exercise of all religions. It is not compatible, however, with a religion that wishes to be the only one. Democracy prevents the establishment of any one creed as state church. It stands in the way of theocratic ambitions.

To proceed from the other direction, religion (also yet to be defined) is compatible with democracy as well, as long as it does not seek establishment. The imposition

of an official religion on all citizens clearly is not compatible with democracy, except its deformed totalitarian version.

A. DEMOCRACY

As used here, the meaning of democracy is not exhausted by such principles as "the rule of the people" or "the rule of the majority." The term is employed to convey more than the location of ultimate sovereignty and the rule by which to decide electoral and policy contests. I use democracy to invoke a certain system of political, legal, and social interactions among the individuals and groups of a society. My meaning, essentially, corresponds to the concept of a liberal and pluralist system. It is very similar to Popper's "open society" and to the German construct of a "*freiheitliche Gesellschaft*."

In addition to such constitutive elements as popular sovereignty, free and secret elections, division of powers, etc., democracy, as used here, also incorporates attributes such as the willingness to compromise, the right to make one's own choices, the recognition of an area of privacy, and the types of civil liberties included in the Bill of Rights of the American Constitution -- most important among them, for present purposes, the separation of church and state.

1. Compromise

To elaborate on these attributes: Assuming a pluralistic society with a diversity of interests and preferences, it is essential, in my view, that citizens, groups, parties, and all other actors manifest a willingness to compromise. A spirit of absolutism is the death of democracy. Neither liberty nor equality can prevail when some members of society insist that they must have all that they desire -- be it material or symbolic goods. Compromise is the lubricant of democratic politics. Without it, the system cannot work.

The greatest threat to a politics of compromise is not selfishness, but self-righteousness. Selfishness, putting one's own interests first, is ordinary and largely inevitable human conduct -- at least until the arrival of the "new socialist personality" or some other such improvement in human design. Selfishness makes living together more difficult, but not impossible. I am not entirely convinced that everyone single-mindedly pursuing his or her own interest will necessarily and invariably produce the optimum common good. Yet it seems that the selfish can cooperate and compromise. Such conduct assures the survival of the system, which is an important part of most persons' self-interest.

Self-righteousness and the spirit of absolutism have different consequences. When an individual has convinced himself that there is only one Correct Policy, and it is his; that there is only one Truth, and he knows it; compromise becomes unthinkable. When based upon religious convictions, this view presents the worst possible scenario for democracy.¹ Compromising one's own principles is bad enough, but compromising religious commandments (God's revealed will) is to offend against God -- and the price is damnation.² And not only damnation.

Transcendental punishment is uncertain, or, at least, not

1. Extremist secular ideologies also do not provide a promising context for open dialogue and decisions based on evidence. Yet, for the most, the doctrines of secular ideologies are acknowledged to be of human origin, thus changeable by human beings. No human being, however, believers will insist, is entitled to modify tenets ordained by the will of God.

2. As Pope John Paul II's *Veritatis Splendor* has it: Morality is absolute; to deviate from Church dogma is sin. Or as Randall Terry has it: To vote for Bill Clinton is a sin against God.

visible. Relying on it, therefore, is risky to those eager to punish. Religious zealots have always seen to it that whatever their stony hearts and inflamed imaginations rated as sins would also be punished in this world. The method is to reconstitute sins as crimes. Is it still a free society, however, when whatever someone imagines to displease his God -- and imaginations tend to run wild: from mixing of fibers to consuming alcoholic beverages -- comes to be penalized by secular authority?

Ideological absolutism -- of the religious or secular type -- gravely injures the individual. It demands the surrender of that which distinguishes men from animals, and grown-ups from children: the person's critical intelligence. Ideological absolutism produces deformed individuals, with greatly impaired mental, spiritual, and emotional lives. There are compensations, of course, in becoming a leader's disciple or (to use religious language) a shepherd's sheep. It is the age-old bargain of the exchange of freedom for security.

Freedom means having to make one's own choices; it means uncertainty and anxiety; it means being responsible for one's own actions. To be free does not mean to have it easy. Uncertainty and responsibility are burdens. To escape from these burdens -- Fromm's "Escape from Freedom" -- is forever tempting. The route leads from freedom and

insecurity to security and unfreedom. There is happiness and satisfaction, of course, in being taken care off, in being told what to do and when to do it, what values and beliefs to hold, in someone else keeping one's conscience, and in receiving answers to all questions.³ The merchants of the Only True Religion and the Only True Science stand forever ready to clasp and enfold those who want to shed the burden of liberty -- and also those who do not.

2. Choice

Free choice is an indispensable attribute of the open society and the democratic polity. The principle of free choice, however, is not fully implemented unless it includes the freedom to make the wrong choice. Forcing people to make "the right choice" -- always, of course, for "their own good" -- takes away free choice. It has been among the greater errors of revolutionaries to believe that the revolution will make people free and virtuous. When the newly free citizens fail to conform to the revolutionary's notion of virtue -- as always they do -- the freedom fighter quickly becomes the tyrant and the

3. Which is why some persons flourish in the barracks and the monasteries.

revolutionary hero the totalitarian dictator. If there is to be a free society, even dancing on holy days and making unpatriotic speeches must not be banned.

But what when the citizens' "wrong choice" is not wickedness or debauchery, but unfreedom? Must a genuine commitment to democracy and liberty include acceptance of the individual's choice even when it is the choice not to have a choice? Can civil libertarians deny a person the choice to submit his mind and conscience to the directives of a party or a church? They cannot, it seems to me, at least as long as that individual's choice is a choice for that individual only.

And herein lies the problem: Typically persons want to choose not merely for themselves but also for others -- all others, if possible. This predilection will, of course, be encouraged by those who stand to benefit from general restrictions on choice: the leaders of parties and churches with universal aspirations.

The motivations for seeking uniformity of belief and conduct are not difficult to understand. On the part of the individual, forcing others into the same pattern further increases the security that was sought in the first instance. If I have come to be persuaded that I have the only true religion and that all other beliefs are heresy (offenses against God), it creates uncertainty and

anxiety to observe that the heretics prosper. It creates the worst of all mental afflictions: doubt.

The motivation of the hierarchy also is security -- unless one wants to believe Dostoyevsky that it is altruism -- but in a different way. At stake here is not mental and psychic security, but social security -- the increase and preservation of absolute, universal, and total rule⁴ and the benefits that flow from it, especially power and wealth.⁵

4. I use these terms as follows: *absolute* rule = the prevailing authority must not be doubted or questioned; *universal* rule = the prevailing authority must be obeyed by all; *total* rule = the commands of the prevailing authority concern all aspects of life.

5. By "wealth" I mean not only the possession of property, but also the control and enjoyment thereof. As Marx did not seem to realize, but as the Princes of Church and Party always have known, the benefits of property (a vastly superior standard of living than the rest of the population) do not require formal ownership.

3. Privacy

All totalitarianisms -- secular and ecclesiastic -- deny that the individual has a right to privacy. They repudiate the idea that there can be and should be a distinction between the public and the private. Instead, they take the position that all acts, and even thoughts, have public (that is, political and/or religious) relevance. It follows from this position that all of human existence is properly subject to surveillance and control, and that no aspect of human life can remain unregulated. Big Brother has made his entry.

4. The Wall of Separation

To prevent the gathering of all power in one hand, a number of Western countries, above all the United States, have adopted various separation and balancing devices, among them, and most important for present purposes, the separation of church and state. Unitary government and concentration of power is the more frequent pattern. While the separation of powers better serves to protect the citizens' rights and liberties, unitary government increases the power of the governors and makes life easier for the rulers.

The separation of powers and the related system of checks and balances have not found favor among those who

favor the totalitarian party regime. With great persistence -- though without all proof -- they have told us of the identity of all interests in socialist societies (therefore needing no division of powers); how the working class cannot act against its own interest (therefore needing no checks and balances); and how the government cannot act against the interests of the people (therefore needing no system of administrative law).

The separation of church and state has found no favor among those who seek the totalitarian church regime. They keep telling us, in the United States, that the Founding Fathers did not mean to separate religion and politics, but rather meant to establish government on Biblical principles, and they tell us -- from other points on the globe -- that the separation of church and state is not compatible with the spirit of Islam or Judaism or whatever.

B. RELIGION

Various parts of the preceding sections have indicated already the type of religion on which this paper is focused: fundamentalist, extremist, absolutist, fanatical -- in short, prophetic religion. But first, more generally, by religion I mean a system of descriptive and normative beliefs, providing criteria for making right

choices, guidance for right conduct, and motivation for action. The system is legitimized by, and gains its authority from, a supernatural source, typically one or more transcendental deities.

It is generally thought that religions can be distinguished from secular ideologies in terms of the supernatural provenance of the former. But there are problems. The distinction seems to work reasonably well when the ideology to be compared is Marxism-Leninism, which derives legitimacy from a non-transcendental factor, its status as True Science. It works less well, however, with national-socialism, which tends to justify its demands for obedience not only by way of the privileged insights of the leader but also by the leader's reception of the special guidance of Providence.

It can be argued, however, that the supernaturalism criterion does not work for Marxism-Leninism either, since the "only true science" is not much less mythical a construct than the "only true religion." Both are characterized by a mindset focused on propagation rather than inquiry, imposition rather than debate, and purity rather than compromise. Both are dogmatic constructs, requiring about equal blindness of their adherents.

Not all secular ideologies display a spirit of absolutism, universalism, and totalitarianism; neither do

all religions. Middle-of-the-road conservatism and liberalism lack this spirit, which is why they are compatible with democracy. Communism and fascism, on the other hand, do have strong absolutist, universalist, and totalitarian filaments, which is why they are not compatible with democracy. Similarly, mainline religious denominations do not typically seek to impose their dogmas and rites on all of society. They tend to give strong support to the separation of church and state. They are compatible with democracy, the open society, and the American Constitutional tradition. It is the goal of prophetic (as distinct from mainstream or pietistic) religion to take over every area of life and to establish God's rule on earth. [Diamond, 1989, 45] Prophetic religion is fundamentally at odds with democracy and the American Constitutional tradition. Theocracy is the constant gleam in the eye of the prophet.⁶

6. What defines the prophet and prophetic religion is the conviction of having received a message and commission from God 'to set things right' on this earth -- and if not by persuasion, then by the sword.

II. THE RESURGENCE OF PROPHETIC-FUNDAMENTALIST RELIGION

A. AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

To talk about religion in the United States is to talk about American exceptionalism. The special American type of religiosity arrived on the continent with the Puritans. These settlers were firm in the belief that they were the newly Chosen People, the recipients of a new Covenant.⁷ They knew that God had selected them for a special task. They were to establish the New Jerusalem, be a shining light to the rest of the world, and bring all other nations to Christ. It was to be done through the example of their holy living and their special devotion to the Almighty. It was the concept, in Tuveson's [1980] words, of America as the "Redeemer Nation."

The basic idea of American exceptionalism is a child of the Protestantism. But it now has survived several waves of non-Protestant and (more recently) non-Christian

7. The idea has retained its currency. It was reflected in Bill Clinton's constant references to "A New Covenant" in his presidential campaign and (especially) in his Acceptance Speech at the Democratic National Convention on July 16, 1992.

immigration. It appears that the notion has been transferred from New England protestantism to Bellah's [1967] civil religion. Most Americans, in some way, feel that they are a purer people, specially favored by Providence, with the role to improve and redeem the world.⁸ "Making the world safe for democracy" or "saving the world from communism" are purposes entirely in tune with the concept of the Redeemer Nation.

American exceptionalism also is revealed in the extraordinary attachment of Americans to churches and religious beliefs. Study after study shows that America has been and remains significantly more religious than other countries, including those at similar levels of development. Among European countries, only Ireland and Poland -- both dominated by a conservative Catholic Church -- exhibit similar levels of religiosity.

Table 1 presents data for a variety of indicators of religious belief and conduct. They were taken from a 1981 cross-national Gallup survey. More recent figures (e.g.,

8. It would be an error, however, to attribute this simply to arrogance or chauvinism. For the greater part, these ideas are closely linked to feelings of special responsibility and obligation.

NEWSWEEK, August 9, 1993; TIME, December 27, 1993) show no significant changes for the United States. The figures for other countries also have held steady. It is quite astonishing to observe that the level of American religiosity is at least twice that of most Northern European countries, and sometimes as much as eight times higher.

TABLE 1

PERCENT WHO

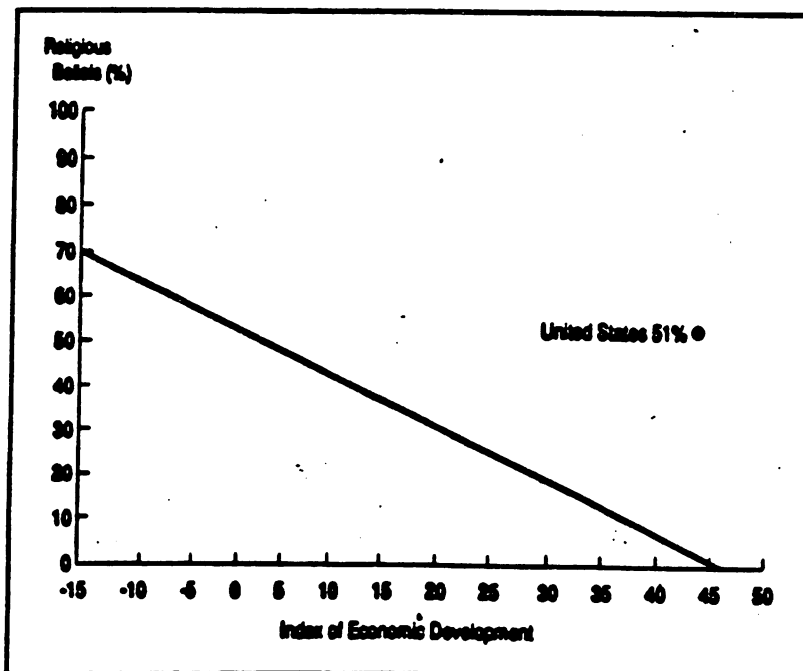
BELIEVE

COUNTRY	BELIEVE				ENGAGE
	IN GOD	IN HEAVEN	IN THE DEVIL	IN HELL	IN PRAYER
United States	95	84	66	67	85
Irish Republic	95	83	57	54	81
Spain	87	50	33	34	69
Italy	84	41	30	31	72
Great Britain	76	57	30	27	50
West Germany	72	31	18	14	59
France	62	27	17	15	44
Denmark	58	17	12	8	48
Sweden	52	26	12	10	33

SOURCE: Gallup Cross-National Values Surveys, 1981.

Figure 1 presents the same information in a different format. It shows the correlation (regression line) between the level of economic development and the proportion of respondents in representative national samples who told the interviewers that religious beliefs were "very important" to them. The overall finding is as expected: as economic development increases, the importance of religion declines -- except for the United States, which forms an extraordinary outlier in the chart.

FIGURE 1



SOURCE: Neuhaus, 1986, 118-121

The religiosity of the population at large is faithfully echoed among the holders of high political office. Most American Presidents engage in endless acts of public, and often ostentatious, religiosity. They range from the frequent invocations of God in public utterances (American Presidents seem to be wholly unable to close an oration without asking God to bless America), to the conduct of Presidential Prayer Breakfasts (begun by Dwight Eisenhower), to declaring The Year of the Bible⁹ (Ronald Reagan, 1983), to receiving highly-visible sojourns of preachers to the White House, and to regular attendance at religious conventions. The worst may yet be to come. President Clinton -- who has been rather taken by the new Politics of Meaning and Communitarianism, and who seems to -----

9. It is difficult to consider this proper conduct of a President of a pluralist, non-theocratic nation. It surely went against the (non-)establishment clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution. While it does not establish any particular Christian denomination, it surely establishes Judeo-Christianity. And it most certainly establishes religion as such, in preference to agnosticism and atheism. As one would expect, however, few seemed to be bothered.

have bought into to Stephen Carter's [1993] apologia for religion-based political activism -- has now declared several times that the Constitutional "freedom of religion" does not mean "freedom from religion," [FREE INQUIRY, Vol.14, No.2, p.5] and, even, that his crime bill should be passed because it was the "will of God." [SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, August 15, 1994, p. A3]

Turning to the legislative branch, Table 2 shows that the religious beliefs and attachments of Members of Congress quite closely resemble those of their constituents. Whether this is a matter of genuine conviction or doing (saying) what is expected, is difficult to know. I am inclined to think that much of it is genuine. As regards the judiciary, with a majority of federal judges now having been appointed by Reagan and Bush -- with the not so gentle advice of far-right religious pressure group -- breaches in the wall of separation of church and state may not meet with much disapproval from the bench.¹⁰

10. Chief Justice Rehnquist, for example, has argued for a greater role for religion in public life. There also has been an increase in judicial approval of religious symbols in public places.

TABLE 2

RELIGIOUS BELIEF	PERCENT OF WHO	
	MEMBERS OF CONGRESS	AMERICAN PUBLIC
Believe in God	95	94
Jesus Christ is Divine	71	83
Bible is the Word of God	80	72
Believe in life after death	81	69
Pray	95	89
Consider religion "very" or "fairly" important	93	84

SOURCE: Benson & Williams, 1986, 78,81

B. THE CURRENT FUNDAMENTALIST REVIVAL

High-pitched religiosity has been a fairly constant factor in American private and public life. But every so often, there have come upon us extraordinary periods of special religious enthusiasm -- when whole battalions are re-born and find salvation, and when it is remembered anew that America is to be a shining beacon to the rest of the world, through its goodness, devotion, and purity. And with the new commitment to purity comes the resurgence of puritanism,¹¹ bringing new injuries to the body politic -- from reduced tolerance for dissent to the infliction of various prohibitions.

The United States has experienced at least three major religious revivals. Such a period is upon us again, and this time the consequences of the attempt to save souls and return the nation to God may be yet more damaging to liberty and democracy than at all previous times. Then preachers were limited to individual tent shows on the sawdust circuit. Now modern technology --

11. It has been said, only half in jest, the definition of puritanism is: The fear that someone, somewhere, is having a good time.

particularly television and mass mailings -- allows preachers to reach audiences counted in the millions, and to collect tributes from equally large numbers. What we have now is a far-flung and powerful coalition of individuals and groups who are determined to impose their values and preferences on the general public. And no longer are the religious zealots all protestants. The catholic right and orthodox judaism have joined in the effort -- persuaded, apparently, that the American theocracy will not be protestant, but judeo-christian.

The enterprise has met considerable success with several administrations (particularly on the part of regulatory agencies) and with Congress. The New Religious Right was able, on the one hand, to prevent the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment, and on the other to get passed the Equal Access Bill (1984). At the local level, the New Religious Right has not only been able to place its members and sympathizers into various appointive and elective offices (often through "stealth" tactics),¹² but

12. Mostly through "stealth" tactics, the New Religious Right was able to gain 60 of 90 positions (mostly schoolboard and city council seats) in San Diego County, California, in 1990. [LOS ANGELES TIMES, October 18, 1992, A21] One of the schoolboards (Vista) promptly decided that

also has managed to have its way with many other officials. Schoolboards, for example, regularly cave in when faced with fundamentalist onslaughts, because they cannot afford to engage in lengthy litigation. It is easier to remove some books from the school library than to defend against the lawsuits threatened by the legal arms of the New Religious Right.¹³ Litigation can achieve what electoral politics may not. Training "Christian lawyers" and adding law schools to their seminaries has been the major thrust of recent New Religious Right activities.

Unfortunately the goals and activities of the New Religious Right are not taken seriously enough by most citizens. One reason is that so many of its most visible members, particularly among the television preachers, are

the Biblical story of creation was to be taught in science classes.

13. E.g., the Rutherford Institute, the American Family Association, the Christian Legal Society, the Christian Law Association, and, last but not least, Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice.

blatant hypocrites, obvious frauds, shameless swindlers, brazen liars, and preposterous clowns. There is the hypocrisy of a Jim Swaggart, who preaches hell fire and brimstone against sexual miscreants, only to be caught in motel rooms with prostitutes. There is fraud of Jim and Tammy Bakker, who spent money that had been collected for charitable purposes on their own luxurious lifestyle. There is the swindle of a Peter Popoff, who claimed that God made him recognize persons and their illnesses, when in fact his wife fed the information over the air into his earpiece. There are the endless prevarications of the Jerry Falwells and Pat Robertsons, in their writings and broadcast programs. And there is the farce of various babbling and jumping clowns, who claim to be filled with the spirit of God, when, in fact, they are putting on a show for the yokels.

Yet all these personages should be taken seriously. For one, because their shams are well-rewarded. They collect million upon millions of dollars each year, sums for which they do not have to give a public accounting, and which they use (contrary to their churches' tax-exempt status) to influence politics. For another, millions of people follows not only the theology of these preachers, but also their politics. History, in any case, would seem to teach that one cannot assume that someone is not a

danger to life and liberty, and the well-being of society, just because he foams at the mouth and talks utter balderdash.

The other, and more recent, reason that the religious zealots are not taken seriously enough is that it has been fairly easy in recent years to gain the impression that their influence has peaked and is declining. Nothing could be further from the truth. They have become less visible -- at least in the national press and broadcast media -- but they have not become less effective. What has changed is tactics (from relative openness to stealth) and focus (from national to local politics). The New Religious Right initially aimed at policy-making and public offices at the upper levels of federal and state politics. This was manifested particularly in Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority and Pat Robertson's 700 Club. As noted, there was some success at the national level. The New Religious Right did contribute to electing (and dis-electing) some members of Congress. Top-level ambitions, however, received a major setback with the failed presidential candidacy of Pat Robertson.

The New Religious Right learned the lesson of the 1988 Republican primaries and of the 1992 presidential election. Times were not right for a take-over from above; it would have to be a take-over from below. Gaining power

from the bottom up takes longer, but leads to the same goal: controlling the life of the nation. And a from-the-bottom-up victory is likely to be more solid and longer lasting than one from the top.

The forces of the New Religious Right have re-grouped at the grassroots level. They have already had substantial success -- both in electing candidates to local offices (often in the form of "stealth" candidates) -- and in influencing the policies of city councils and schoolboards. In addition, the New Religious Right has taken over at least one-third of the local Republican Party organizations.¹⁴ The results of this take-over were visible already at the 1992 Republican National Convention -- an event that was more of a prayer meeting than a political convention. In effect, the delegates agreed with Pat Buchanan that the nation was in the middle of a religious war (the "secular humanists" against "religious America") and adopted the Bible, all but in name, as the proper platform of the Republican Party. And President Bush thought it fitting to denounce the Democratic Party because its platform did not refer to God.

14. Pat Robertson's declared goal is to control a majority of the local organizations of the Republican Party by 1996.

In fairness, it must be noted that the two most religious Presidents since Eisenhower (who began his 1953 Inaugural Address with a three-paragraph prayer) have been Democrats: Jimmy Carter, whose "born-again" quality mobilized the formerly rather uninvolved fundamentalist,¹⁵ and Bill Clinton, who, as seen above, recently declared that "freedom of religion" does not include "freedom from religion." Presidential approval of what can only be mandatory (if non-denominational) religious confession and observance does not bode well for American democracy.

III. DISSONANCES AND DANGERS

A. UNFREEDOM AND ILLUSION: AS CHOICE AND AS MANDATE

As noted earlier, a principled conception of civil liberties must include the individual's freedom to make the wrong choice -- certainly the "wrong choice" from alternative subjective perspectives, and to a considerable extent even the objectively "wrong choice," such as

15. In spite of his personal religiosity, President Carter was a strict separationist -- to the great disappointment of his born-again supporters.

smoking cigarettes (always excluding, of course, wrong choices that objectively harm others). Thus, if some persons want to forsake critical intelligence and substantiated facts in favor of intuition and superstition, in a free society they have the right to do so. Thus, if a sailor prefers to sacrifice a chicken in the Temple of Poseidon rather than consult maritime charts and weather reports in order to assure a safe voyage across the seas, he must be able to have his way -- as long, that is, as he is to be the only person aboard the vessel.

But what if he wants others to join him? What, if upon receiving polite refusals, he insists? What if he says that God told him that all others must join him? What, further, if he succeeds in persuading a majority that his way is the way of God, and manages to get a law adopted and enforced that makes participation in the voyage compulsory? The sailor of this story is fictitious, the general type of person, however, is not. It is the prophet, the fanatic, the zealot, the extremists, the fundamentalist. The voyage of my story also is fictitious, but the general process is not. It is the pattern by which private fantasies become public law. It is the paradigm by which particularistic and narrow interpretations of some holy book are transformed into statutes by which all must live.

Invariably, those who have persuaded themselves that God has spoken to them and revealed His Will, feel compelled to share their good fortune.¹⁶ Knowing themselves to be the instruments of Providence and the duly appointed saviors of the rest of us, they will accept no refusals to their invitations and will tolerate no opposition to their designs. As they see it, opposition to The Truth never is legitimate -- in the words of the Vatican: Error does not have the same rights as truth. From the perspective of the truth-knowers, opposition is never loyal, but always subversive. Opponents are heretics and agents of satan.¹⁷

Prophets are absolutists who aim at the establishment of totalitarian regimes. In pursuit of this goal, they will push and shove as far as the system, in which they find themselves, will allow. They will have no more qualms to destroy freedom and democracy than they have in

16. Those who believe they have discovered The Truth, through superior mental powers or unequaled scientific investigations, share in this compulsion.

17. For the secular extremists, opponents are traitors and agents of the class- or race-enemy.

destroying individual lives. And they will take full advantage of all the freedoms and rights that a democratic society offers. They will not hesitate to make use of freedom of speech and of the free exercise of religion in order to erase these very freedoms.

It is the inherent vulnerability of the free society that it furnishes tools that can be used for its own destruction. Yet, how can a free society deny freedom of speech, even when that speech is directed against freedom of speech? Restrictions on anyone's freedom will quickly bring charges of inconsistency and hypocrisy. Indeed, democracy would most likely become untrue to itself. This is the fundamental dilemma of a democratic and free society: How can it defend itself against its enemies and remain true to its principles?

B. THEOCRACY

There is no doubt that the New Religious Right seeks to establish theocracy -- the government of God on earth. "Theocracy" and "government of God" are misleading terms, of course. God has nothing to do with it. What we are talking about is government by the clergy. There are enough examples -- in history and our times -- to know exactly what such rule looks like.

These are the words of Jerry Falwell of Moral Majority fame, by no means the most extreme member of the New Religious Right (all quotations from LISTEN, AMERICA!):

SECULAR AUTHORITY HAS A SUPERNATURAL FOUNDATION:

"The authority ... [of] the President, the Congress, the Judiciary are ordained of God." (15)

"A political leader [is] a minister of God." (98)

"I am positive in my belief regarding the Constitution that God led in the development of that document ..." (21)

SECULAR LAWS MUST BE BASED ON THE BIBLE:

"... God [has] promoted America to a greatness no other nation has ever enjoyed because [it] is ... a republic governed by laws predicated on the Bible." (16)

"... America has reached the pinnacle of greatness unlike any nation in human history because our Founding Fathers established America's laws and precepts on the principles recorded in the laws of God ..." (29)

We are our "brother's keeper" and it is wrong to conclude "that we have no business trying to legislate Christian morality on a non-Christian society." (262)

"The authority of Bible morality must once again be

recognized as the legitimate guiding principle of our nation." (265)

SECULAR LEADERSHIP MUST BE GODLY:

"We need in America today powerful, dynamic, and godly leadership." (16)

"Only by godly leadership can America be put back on a divine course." (17)

"George Washington is reported to have said, 'It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.'" (44)

THERE IS TO BE A RELIGIOUS (AND SPECIFICALLY CHRISTIAN)

TEST FOR OFFICE HOLDING:

"If a person is not a Christian, he is inherently a failure ..." (62)

"If a man is not a student of the Word of God and does not know what the Bible says, I question his ability to be an effective leader." (17)

Approvingly: "... many of the first colonial institutions required that a person make a public profession in Jesus Christ before he could hold a public office." (34)

AMERICA IS TO BE A CHRISTIAN NATION:

"... our great nation was founded by godly men upon godly principles to be a Christian nation. Our Founding Fathers ... developed a nation predicated on Holy Writ.

The religious foundations of America find their roots in the Bible." (29)

THERE IS TO BE TOTAL COMMITMENT TO THE LAWS AND PRIORITIES OF GOD:

"In 1607 [the] Puritans ... [came] in search of a place where they could freely worship God and live in total commitment to His laws." (30)

"We must come back lovingly but firmly, and establish as our priorities once again those priorities that are God's priorities." (50)

We need revival because in our pride "we began to tamper with His absolute standards, making them subject to our own opinions and decisions." (249)

THERE MUST NOT BE FREEDOM FROM RELIGION:

Quoting Senator Helms with approval: "... the drug culture, ... pornography, crime, and fornication ... [are] the bitter fruit of ... freedom from religion." (222)

NATIONAL PROSPERITY FLOWS FROM OBEDIENCE TO GOD:¹⁸

"... evils and destruction ... have fallen upon every

18. Reflecting this theme, President Bush declared in his 1992 State of the Union Address: "By the grace of God, America has won the Cold War."

... nation that has turned its back on God." (18)

"We must ... have a return to biblical basics. If the Congress of the United States will take its stand on that which is right and wrong, and if our President, our judiciary system, and our state and local leaders will take their stand on holy living, we can turn this country around." (18)

"God has blessed this nation because in its early days she sought to honor God and the Bible, the inerrant word of the living God." (29)

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE MUST NOT BE QUESTIONED:

"America is in trouble today because her people are forgetting the origin of their liberty, and questioning the authority and the inerrancy of the Bible." (29-30)

"The Bible is absolutely infallible, without error in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as well as in areas such as geography, science, history, etc."
(63)

PREACHERS MUST GUIDE AMERICANS BACK TO GOD:

"... the churches ... of America have a responsibility, not just a right, to see to it that the moral climate and conscience of Americans is such that this nation can be healed ..." (19)

As a pastor ... I am calling my fellow American citizens to unite in a moral crusade for righteousness

in our generation. ... It is time to call America back to God." (266)

The Reverend Doctor Falwell's thinking, obviously, has not advanced much beyond the days of Galileo. It ought to frighten anyone with an attachment to intellectual liberty and freedom of inquiry to hear that the Bible is to be considered infallible even in respect to matters of geography, science, and history -- particularly from a man who is and was friend and advisor to American Presidents and Congressional leaders. Yet, in the context of the New Religious Right, this is a moderate. Much more extreme statements can be found in the utterances of "Dominion Theology" and "Christian Reconstructionism."

Given that the present danger to American democracy arises from religion rather than from secular ideologies, and from the religious right rather than the religious left, the prospect for the United States, should the New Religious Right succeed, is that of a clerical-fascist theocracy, with strong absolutist and totalitarian tendencies. It will not do to say: But they have no chance. Such words were spoken about other tyrants-in-the-making -- up to the very point of the *Machtergreifung*, the take-over.

C. THE LIBERAL DILEMMA AND WHAT TO DO

What, then, are those to do, who oppose dictatorship and the closed society and support democracy and liberty? First of all, they must pay more attention to local politics and encourage the media to do likewise. In particular, they must see to it that "stealth candidates" will be exposed for what they are. Local offices must not remain the easy harvests of organized and duplicitous minorities, as they have been because of traditionally low interest and small voter turnouts. To influence local elections requires organization, as do all other efforts to defend democracy, from fund-raising to gathering and providing information.¹⁹ The theocrats are well organized

19. The New Religious Right is particularly good in mailing out appeals for funds (to defeat the humanist threat of the week) and voter guides. Also available are a great variety of how-to-do publications, such as Robert Simonds' HOW TO ELECT CHRISTIANS TO PUBLIC OFFICE. Simonds is president of the (deceptively named) Citizens for Excellence in Education. It is part of his advice to fundamentalist Christian candidates not to reveal their religious affiliation and goals, but to pose as "conservatives."

in numerous institutes, roundtables, clubs, and fellowships, tied to each other in complex coalitions and federations.

The supporters of democracy also must undertake major educational efforts. Negatively, they must expose the fundamentalist preachers for what they are and what their success would mean for America. Positively, they must publicize and explain the advantages of a liberal, pluralistic democracy. They must work -- just as the preachers do -- to solicit funds to cover the expenses of educational efforts, turn out the vote for candidates and propositions, organize, publish, and lobby President and Congress. Government agencies must be encouraged to properly regulate and oversee the political activities of church-related entities, particularly in the broadcasting area. They must demand the appointment of judges who support the separation of church and state. They must use the courts to bring lawsuits in defense of civil liberties just as the other side is bringing suits to demolish them. Finally, they must not be afraid of being labeled "anti-religious," which surely they will.

In a democracy, the key task is, of course, to gain the support of the general public. Unfortunately, it has always been more difficult for liberal democrats to attract popular support than for extremists. The whole

point of the liberal creed is not to give easy answers and impose preferred doctrines and lifestyles on other people, but to let everyone make his own choices -- limited only by injuries that might be caused to other parties.

Liberals simply are unable to say: This is the Truth, and you must follow it. The position that liberals take is the position, one might say, of not taking a position. And while, in some sense, not taking a position may also be considered a position, it does not have the emotional power of the messages vented by the agitators at the religious and secular extremes. Reasonableness, typically, is no match for fanaticism.

The point is, that the instrumentarium available to the supporters of democracy may not be adequate to the defense of democracy. The means permitted to the defenders are limited by democracy's own principles, and by the American Constitution which reflects these principles. May, then, illiberal means be used in defense of liberty? May unconstitutional means be used in defense of the Constitution? Or will the use of such means be, in the last analysis, self-destructive.

In spite of such concerns, there often have been affirmative answers to questions about the permissibility of (in principle) illegal acts in illegal (lawless) circumstances. The assassination of tyrants, to take the

extreme case, has quite consistently been sanctioned in the West by secular thinkers and ecclesiastic authorities alike. On normative grounds a case for illegal acts can be made. But this does not answer the practical question: Will this act have the desired effect and only the desired effect? I don't think one can be sure.

Is there another road that can be taken to let those have their way, who (to speak with Feuerbach) want to worship their own inventions, and who, to secure these inventions would willingly pay the price of intellectual and emotional impoverishment, of unfreedom and regimentation, and of untruth and exploitation -- but a road that would not lead to the imposition of these inventions on those who do want them; a road, in other words, that would not lead to the transformation of canon law into secular ordinances. There is only one answer that occurs to me: separation.²⁰

20. Audi [1989] has advanced an alternative: Voluntary abstinence from offering political arguments that are motivated only by religious rationales; advancing such arguments only if secular rationales can be found for them. What Audi demands is an intra-personal separation of church and state, an internal wall that would keep apart a person's religious and political values and thoughts. I

D. SEPARATION

Separation is a drastic step, but it is worth thinking about. History shows quite clearly that it is better to let incompatible people divorce, than insist that they must continue to live together. There is no obvious reason why the principle of self-determination -- which is widely accepted and U.N. sanctioned -- should apply only to ethnic groups. Separation, even of the involuntary type, denies nothing to those who have been separated. They lose none of their freedoms, rights, or capacities -- except one: imposing their views on others.

There are at least two way to effect separation: setting up interspersed enclaves or dividing the nation. There is experience with both. The Thirty Years War was fought because protestants as well as catholics refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other side's religious choice. The constellation of forces was such that neither

doubt that this is possible. The most likely consequence, should such a rule become a norm of public discourse, is deception. The zealots who already use stealth, will have no scruples to wrap their religious motivations in secular camouflage.

faction could decisively defeat the other. After 30 years, the human and economic resources of both sides were exhausted. Yet both remained to be firm in the belief that any principality had to be catholic or protestant, but could not be both. Civic peace was thought to require religious uniformity. Accordingly, the Treaty of Westfalia (1648) divided the empire into a large number of religious enclaves, some protestant, some catholic. While it caused significant population migrations, it worked rather well. Each religion could practice its own version of the Faith, without imposing on the other and without being imposed upon. And there were no further religious wars.

On the American continent, the state of Utah can be viewed as a religious enclave. Mormons, persecuted elsewhere, developed their own state in the wilderness. They set up what their hearts desired: a theocracy (only partially modified by the terms of admission to the United States). Non-Mormons, who do not wish to live under the regiment of the Mormon Church, can reside elsewhere. Similarly, Quakers, Baptists, and others organized their own communities and states to be free of Puritan oppression.

A small number of enclaves within a larger nation would not produce insurmountable difficulties. A whole system of enclaves, however, tends to be messy: too many

natural geographic units divided by too many borders. A complex federal structure is needed to deal with the issues of common concern. And while the conflict has been resolved at the enclave level, it remains unresolved at the federal level. The Jerry Falwells of this world can be counted upon to continue to demand that all federal laws must reflect the wishes of God, and all federal officers must conduct their work in accordance with Biblical principles.

It is a cleaner solution by far to divide the nation rather than to set up enclaves. Contrary to Lincoln, there is no particularly compelling reason why the United States of America must remain a single nation. Empires, nations, and, even, American states have been partitioned and have divided themselves in various ways -- often with admirable results. Switzerland and the Netherlands once were part of the German Empire. They became separate nations as part of the aforementioned Treaty of Westfalia. Who would call these new nations failures? The division of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan was seen as a fiasco by Gandhi and many others. Given the experiences since, it seems fair to say that without separation there would have been, and still would be, even more bloodshed. It can also be predicted that there will be no end to trouble in the North of India until the Sikhs have gained independence.

And how many lives would have been saved if Biafra had been permitted to secede -- or if the American South had been permitted to go its own way. What stands in the way of this solution typically is personal and national pride. There are always those who insist that they were not elected to preside over the dissolution of the British Empire, the United States, or whatever.

To return to the present and to the problem presented by the New Religious Right, it surely is worth considering whether we would not all be better off if the followers of the New Religious Right had their country, and we ours. By all means, let those who wish to be unfree, be free to be unfree -- but not impose their rejection of liberty and democracy on the rest of us. Let the religious zealots practice their zealotry -- but elsewhere, in their own lands. Personally, I would be quite willing to let them have some of the American states -- the Georgia of Senator Nunn, the North Carolina of Senator Helms, and the South Carolina of Senator Thurmond, readily come to mind. Once they have parted, the rest of us will live in a smaller but also more democratic, liberal, humane, and pleasant country.

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