Not So Strange Bedfellows

Not So Strange Bedfellows: The Nexus of Politics and Religion in the 21st Century

Edited by

Jim Jose and Rob Imre

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

Not So Strange Bedfellows:
The Nexus of Politics and Religion in the 21st Century,
Edited by Jim Jose and Rob Imre

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2013 by Jim Jose and Rob Imre and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4800-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4800-8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables and Figures ... vii

Part I: Introduction

Chapter One ... 2
Situating the Nexus of Politics and Religion in the 21st Century
Jim Jose and Rob Imre

Part II: The Religion of Politics: Foundations of the Nexus

Chapter Two ... 14
On Keeping Religion Out of Politics
Stephen Chavura

Chapter Three ... 26
Mainline Calvinists, Pamphlets and Democracy in Revolutionary Britain 1641-1646
Graham Maddox and Tod Moore

Chapter Four ... 45
Dynamic Confucianism in the Sinic World: Nationalism, Democracy, Postcolonialism
Christine Doran

Chapter Five ... 60
Colonialism, Civilization and Indigenous Law: The Protection of Aboriginal Spiritual Interests in Land in American and Canadian Courts
Guy Charlton

Part III: The Politics of Religion: The Nexus Explored

Chapter Six ... 78
Soft Identities and Hard Realities: The Limits of Governance and Non-Territorial Identity
W. John Hopkins

Chapter Seven 91
The Role of Religion in Poland's Relations and its Eastern Neighbours
Des Brennan

Chapter Eight 98
Helmut Kohl's Catholic Nationalism
Christian Wicke

Chapter Nine 117
Reconstruction and Religion: The Case of Iraq, Ayatollahs and Local Ownership
Hawzhin Azeez

Chapter Ten 133
Re-imagining Islamist Violence in Indonesia: Radicalization and the State
Josh Snider

Chapter Eleven 149
The Value of Faith in the Provision of Welfare: An Australian Perspective
Sandra Reeves

Chapter Twelve 168
The Relationship between Politics and Religion in Nigeria:
A Not So Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde?
Richard Oloruntoba

Part IV: The Persistence of the Nexus

Chapter Thirteen 186
Religion and Nation Building in Australia and East Germany:
"Getting our money's worth?"
Dominic Fitzsimmons

Chapter Fourteen 195
No Gods, No Masters: The *Sine Qua Non* of Political Rule?
Jim Jose

Contributors 209

Index 213

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

Table 3.1: Typology of Calvinist Political Thought 28

Figures

Figure 11.1: CASS - Client Responses to ER Provision 157

Figure 11.2: CASS - Client ER requests 161

PART I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

SITUATING THE NEXUS OF POLITICS AND RELIGION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

JIM JOSE AND ROB IMRE

Introduction

This volume on religion and politics explores the nexus created by belief in doctrine and adherence to socio-political cultural conventions. This nexus has traditionally been approached from a standpoint that posits the idea of secularity as the governing principle. Hence, when politics and religion are seen as intersecting with each other the problem is seen in terms of encroachment or clash. Our approach challenges this orthodoxy. Our critical perspective offers a novel approach for understanding the nexus between religion and politics.

In the first place we start from the idea that treats "democracy", the desirable face of politics, as a doctrine in the same way as "Christianity" is taken to be a doctrine. That is, each involves a particular system of beliefs, values and practices that over time ossify critical analysis such that contemporary debates become trapped within constantly shifting "fixed" positions. Such positions are fixed in the sense that they are seemingly beyond question, yet they are treated as constantly shifting in order for protagonists to justify their places as the appropriate authorities. Thus, for example, from our novel perspective, attendance to worship—acting on religious convictions—need not be a function of belief any more than voting—acting on political convictions—need be a function of belief in the efficacy of democracy (and hence of a belief in politics).

Both religion and politics involve institutional arrangements that give substance to a range of beliefs, and each arrangement can accommodate a diversity of beliefs that need not be entirely self-consistent. Both domains can be foregone conclusions in that each "works" simply because an institutional arrangement is present. Yet as configured within our contemporary Western societies, political and religious institutions serve to reinforce each other, no less than in non-Western, non-Christian societies. It matters little whether the political institutions are democratic or otherwise, nor does it matter what brand of religion is involved. In our view, the institutional intersections will vary according to historical contingency while at the same time exhibiting a level of constancy denied in orthodox accounts, especially those predicated on ideas about a "clash of civilizations" (c.f. Huntington 1997).

Our critical approach to the nexus of religion and politics demonstrates how the two are entwined in what some have referred to as "habitus" (e.g. Bourdieu 1990), some regard as a "discourse of power" (e.g. Foucault 1984;1980), and some see as an entwining of modern ideologies such as Marxism combining with progressive Catholicism to produce liberation theology (Berryman 1987). Our premise rejects outright the clash of civilization thesis, a rejection done effectively already by a number of scholars (e.g. Ali 2003; Rasheed 1997). Indeed, we also reject the key trope used by scholars to engage in this debate, namely the idea of a "clash", which locks Huntington's critics into the terms of his unhelpful and limiting discourse (Imre & Jose 2010). Our concern is more probing since we question how we arrived at where we are in the first place. We problematise the relationship between religion and politics through a number of inter-related, though by no means homogenous approaches.

Our contributors examine the ways in which nation-states actively participate in the construction of this nexus even as they extol their commitment to secular values. Various essays demonstrate how nation-states develop political religions, how they actively promote a politics infused with religiosity, and how they transfer symbols and meanings from one socio-political construct to another. As such our contributors demonstrate how civil society and religion are mixed. More importantly, and most politically, they demonstrate in one way or another that "secular" democracy (and indeed secular politics of any kind) is not radically separate from religion. Indeed, the position common to a number of the contributions is that secularity presupposes the necessity for the presence of religion in one form or another. In short, if there was no religion, politics would have to invent it. We argue that religion as an institution has political and social influence more subtle and nuanced than the simplistic "God vs. democracy" dichotomy.

This volume develops this nuanced understanding via an examination of various institutional dimensions. The contributors examine activities in a number of historical and geographic locations involving diverse religious and political movements. In sum the essays decidedly repudiate the currently dominant orthodoxies on the nexus between religion and politics by offering novel interpretations of this nexus. In short we understand the nexus as less an intertwining and more as a fusion, a point underscored emphatically by the argument developed in Chapter 2 that the separation of the two is next to impossible. We also see this fusion as captured quite nicely by the term “political religion”. We take up a discussion of this later in this chapter, but before doing that we want to make a number of points in the next section that pertain to the themes already noted.

Politics, Religion and Faith

We are not suggesting that religion and politics are identical phenomena. Nor are we suggesting that “democracy” and “Christianity” (or any other religion) are identical. We are suggesting that in upholding the values particular to democracy and Christianity respectively people invoke similar habits or ways of articulating their commitment to them. That is, both democracy and Christianity involve routinized forms of behaviour that could be described as rituals, and in that sense a predominantly religious or spiritual term finds common ground with a supposedly secular term. What we are aiming to get across here is not the presence of rituals but that people tend to rely on ritualized modes of understanding and seemingly non-rational modes of behaviour. The intersection of religion and politics then becomes very blurred. But more importantly, it enables the one to be seen as much like the other (and vice versa) and hence blurs the crucial lineaments of power peculiar or specific to each. As such it undermines how we might understand the social organisation of power in any given society.

While it is commonly accepted that in a religious context faith prevails over reason (though it does not necessarily exclude reason) in the political context of democracy reason is assumed to prevail and, in contradistinction to religion, to exclude faith. Yet if we probe a little deeper, faith also circulates within democratic political systems, if not openly then certainly within the capillary-like byways of the circulatory system of power that is understood to constitute the political logic of democratic political systems. This logic, particularly apposite of majoritarian democracies, has been described as the “loop model of democracy” (Miller and Fox 2007, 4), reflecting what Colebatch (2009, 62) has described as “the modernist liberal democratic narrative of government”. Miller and Fox identify six elements of this model that in combination authorise some to make decisions and exercise power on behalf of the rest of the population, usually loosely described as “the people” who are assumed to be the sovereign authority in the last instance. Even in polities where “the people” are not formally regarded as sovereign (e.g. Australia) there is widespread belief that governments are authorised, that is legitimised by "the people", the voters who elect them.

To see how this logic is structured it is worth reproducing here the key points from Miller and Fox's model.

1. The people are aware of what they want or need.
2. Competing candidates (or parties) for electoral office—political entrepreneurs—offer alternative packages of wants or needs that can be satisfied by particular methods.
3. People choose a representative by voting for which alternative package seems best to match their preferences.
4. Coalitions of winning entrepreneurs pass laws reflecting the people's choices.
5. A vigilant populace pays enough attention to the process and the results to judge the elected representatives as either successful or wanting.
6. If satisfied with the results, people will reward incumbents with their votes; if unsatisfied they will vote for alternative entrepreneurs offering alternative packages (Miller and Fox 2007, 4-5).

In sum, something called "government" is democratically called into existence, that is, to say given existential form, and is identified "with a loosely-defined condensation of political and bureaucratic authority" to which "the people" defer (Colebatch 2009, 62). But it is not just "government" and its authority that is given existential form through this process. The entity known as "the people", supposedly the very origins of this authority, is also called into existence, indeed given its form by the political process itself. Yet as Miller and Fox suggest, "the phrase *the people* masks the radical absence of any such monistic aggregation, of any such consensus" (2007, 5. Emphasis in original). The loop is fed by a sort of belief, by faith, in a process that becomes self-validating.

A similar loop could be said to characterise religion. Instead of the authority of the "people" there is the authority of "God", or the divine, which is taken as the originating source of spiritual enlightenment. It is believed to have enlightened "the people" as to their needs, duties and practices. However, such enlightenment is not usually immediately visible to everyone. Rather it appears in the first instance to a privileged few who take "the word" as revealed and disseminate it, which in turn calls for the need for institutional organisation of various forms. These institutions, churches of a similar kind, become the means not just to disseminate the revealed truths; they become the means to call forth the congregation, the set of believers who give the process its substance. In turn the congregation, by its presence at regular meetings overseen by the representatives of the institutions that have come to embody the original beliefs and revealed truths, reaffirms the authority of those institutions and their functionaries, thereby bringing into existence, in the last instance, the divine source of that authority. The first and last instance are thereby united by faith and belief and, like the “loop of democracy”, becomes self-validating.

While there might be some quibbles over the specific details of these two models, the political and the religious, we would suggest that our characterisation of them is not too far off the mark. Both are driven by a series of beliefs and involve entities that gain their existential import and authority from the practices that constitute them. Both depend less on the rule of reason, certainly far less than their proponents would accept, and more on belief in nominalistic if not metaphysical entities. This means that the separation of the one from the other is less effective than either would allow. More importantly, if nominalistic or metaphysical entities underpin each then it becomes impossible for authorities in each sphere to engage in meaningful dialogue in the sense that neither is able to concede any ground to the other. After all if “the people”/“God” have spoken then what room for manoeuvre is left for their respective representatives? The positions are fixed in advance, regardless of the intentions of the participants. And when authority figures argue from fixed positions, demonization of those with whom one disagrees becomes normalized, both as a political and religious practice.

We can see this in the various invocations of the “war on terror”, of “crusades”, of “jihads”, and so on. But it is not just the so-called extremists, political, religious, or any other categorization. Indeed, it is more the case that it is the so-called moderates, especially in political circles, who often turn out to be the most dangerous because they operate within belief structures that deny any fixity of position. Safe in their belief that they are not dogmatists but reasonable people they are able to project themselves as open to negotiated outcomes. Yet precisely because they represent the will of “the people”, and are mandated by the electoral process to protect that “will” come what may, they are already operating from a metaphysical position. Seen from this perspective wherein lies the difference from their religious counterparts?

Political Religion(s)

The concept of “political religions” is usually identified with totalitarian politics. The work of Roger Griffin (2006) and Emilio Gentile (1996) build on the work of Eric Voegelin who developed the concept in the 1930s. They based their work on totalitarian political systems that sought to substitute religion with the secular state. What we aim to identify is something that will add to the political religions literature rather than reignite and already overused “secular politics” vs religion debate and all of its exigencies. The political religion discussion is far more interesting in terms of opening up new debate on the intertwined situation that exists between religion and politics. The concept of “political religion” has changed and developed since the end of the Cold War and the re-ignition of a “fear politics” in the post 9/11 era has created a new interpretation of this fear. While debate about political possibilities opened up in the 1990s with discussions about post-socialism and post-Marxism (Badiou 2012, 2012a; Bosteels 2011), this was quickly quashed with the “war on terror” in democracies around the world as Badiou and Bosteels chronicle in their works on post-Marxist alternatives. We were then left with a near hegemony of liberal-democracy, and global capitalism. The repercussions for the nexus of politics and religion thus conjure up considerations that push well beyond a simple clash of civilizations.

A major shift in thinking about this nexus revolves around the role of messianism. Messianism presents us with a ubiquitous problem in contemporary politics, whether in election campaigns, policy debates, or in general media discourse within liberal democracy. There is a posited necessity to hang political fortunes on those imbued with the quality of “leadership” aggressively driving a political agenda, the charismatic leader no less. Typically, the political agenda is presented in the form of a “crisis” and the leader then must deliver the people from that crisis. This obvious stifling of policy debate, as well as political reform, means that leadership takes on a messianic quality similar to the valorisation of CEOs within the corporate structures promoted by neoliberal philosophies.

A demand emerges for a charismatic leader, and whether any given leader begins with messianic qualities or not, the ever-present demand quickly imbues one or other political actor with messianic qualities. Political debate is often framed around the deliverance of the state from a current crisis, manufactured or otherwise, to lead it towards the economic and political stability of its polity. This is akin to a global continuation of the “Cult of the Supreme Being” established by Robespierre during the French Revolution. Replacing the monarchy with some form of unquestioned set of personal characteristics, often sociopathic, constrained the radical democrats of the revolution to act in an authoritarian manner. They galvanized the nation in an attempt to defeat the counter-revolutionaries, and in more recent times this galvanizing approach has become a ubiquitous characteristic of contemporary politics.

There is a direct lineage between fascism/totalitarianism and this Robespierrean version of a “state religion”. In this case we see the establishment of the “Cult of Reason” that delivers a new ideology at the end of the 1700s designed by Robespierre to supplant the religious fervour of his newly established co-nationals in France. Here, the actual concept of “Reason” was meant to contain the devotional characteristics of a populace so used to God(s), and led to Robespierre being beheading by Napoleon. The twentieth century version of this, according to Emilio Gentile, was Italian Fascism. The attempt to build a “new man” and a new society was based on the sacralization of the state in Mussolini’s Italy. Gentile’s analysis points out precisely the ways in which symbols and rhetoric of the Catholic Church were simply transposed with the new symbols of the state. Similarly, Figes and Kolonitskii (1999) write of the political religion of the Russian Revolution. Figes and Kolonitskii demonstrate how the Russian Revolution, like the French Revolution, brought about a state religion, replacing one with the other, and continued on through Stalin’s Russia, maintaining the symbols of the Russian Orthodox Church. Indeed, their thesis was borne out in part by both the seamlessness of the first shift away from the Orthodox Church to the orthodoxy of Marxism-Leninism during post-Revolution Russia, and then seamlessly, once again, from Marxist-Leninist ideology to the contemporary version of Putin’s state-centric, church-supported political religion.

Alternatives?

While contemporary politics remains trapped within the modern problem of political religion, specifically that of entwining religion and politics, there may be alternatives. For example, the postmodern challenge to the modern state, as developed by Zygmunt Bauman in his *Postmodern Ethics*, has sought to counter the radical distinction between “self” and “other” in modern politics. Bauman’s concern is that modern states retain the religious nature of definitions of the polity that will guarantee a demonization of a particular group or category of person. Surrounded by devils and demons, the modern state attempts to counteract this evil by locking up asylum seekers, creating moral panics around gay marriage, or substituting apostasy for "loyalty" questions around migrants. Bauman's challenge is to discard all of this for a radical ethic of care in which the needs of the other are placed first (Bauman 1993). Granted, many religious doctrines embrace, or at least would claim to embrace, the same ethical concern: Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, will all agree on the primacy of human dignity and the attenuate evil of poverty and disadvantage. However, the problem is that religious organizations and their willing embrace of the institutional protections of the state end up sacrificing this ethical doctrine to facilitate their internecine battles over religious dogma on the one hand, as well as on the other, entering into a "power bargain" in which power over constituencies becomes more important than the discussion about universal care of the other. States look after citizens, unless they breach a commandment just as religious organizations look after their own constituents, rather than concern themselves with those outside of their own spiritual realm. It is an interesting question as to why religious organizations place access to power above the doctrinal care of the other, as required by so many of these religious approaches.

Perhaps the only thing missing from a contemporary system of political religion is the discarding of utopianism by most democratic polities. In the post-Cold War period, and indeed the post-9/11 period, most state leaders have stopped engaging in grand nation-building schemes, mostly as a result of the entrenchment of neo-liberalism (Harvey 2007). In discarding the utopian ideal of a fully functioning state, the primary ideological position is one that claims the state cannot incur financial debt in order to build infrastructure. Infrastructure building must be cost-effective as well as financially viable; indeed, make a profit or privatize, but no debt! This is one of the greater innovations of the neoliberal state: the end of utopia. An alternative to maintaining political religion might be something that involves the return of a utopian condition, as a counter to living with the apocalyptic catastrophism written about by Zizek (2012). Rather than loyalty to the state or nation, or loyalty to a religious position, a utopic condition to counter this messianism as well as the "coming apocalypse" can deliver an alternative view, albeit not without the danger associated with utopias of the past. Coupled with messianism and Zizekian catastrophism, political leaders have managed to imbue a sense of permanent crisis on their polities, to be remedied by a leader, charismatic if not messianic, to lead the people out of the manufactured crisis. Economies that have weathered the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2009 quite well, such as Australia and Canada for example, still frame their political rhetoric in terms of "strong leadership", fear of the other, and the necessity of placing associated dangers at the forefront of policy and political decisions.

The final point we make about an alternative to political religion is the possibility of the rejection of contemporary politics through a "politics of the multitude" or the various forms of the "occupy" movements around the world. These movements were triggered by the rejection of the dominance of global financial capital, the various austerity programs that followed, and the deeply entrenched links between governments and large banks and multinational corporations (MNCs). Bailout programs designed to benefit large banks and MNCs ensured that the benefits would be applied at a particular level of the global capitalist system where a vast majority of people would not be able to access these "rescue packages". Neither messianic nor (although possibly) apocalyptic these "occupy" and/or "multitudinal" movements sought to express their disdain for their own governments by taking over spaces in cities around the world. Indeed, their rejection of political religions created the question about "what do they want" as a negative characteristic of these complaints. Rejecting "politics as usual" the mass protests did not engage the political system with traditional demands. Worker's rights, wage demands, or other types of political change were but a small part of what the protests were about as most of the demonstrations involved calls for such wholesale changes to the system of political religion that the demonstrations were dismissed outright as impossible to even understand. A detailed analysis of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of the essays presented here, but for an introduction to some of these issues see Badiou (2012a).

Conclusion

As we have stated above, what we are trying to do in this book is to challenge the idea that when politics and religion are seen as intersecting with each other it is a problem to be understood in terms of encroachment or clash. Our approach challenges this orthodoxy. Our critical perspective offers a novel approach for understanding the nexus between religion and politics. Hence in the section on the foundations of the nexus, the contributors therein discuss the ways in which this complexity has been established. Often we assume that there is a "classical" distinction between political power and interests, and religious power and interests. This classical element assumes that Locke and Mill, Indigenous peoples, and various civilizations have a kind of "primordial" and/or pre-modern concern with religion and when the "modern" state develops, this state then sheds its primordial origins. The various authors in this section demonstrate that this need not be the case. In fact, the locus of power never shifts, and this assumption of a pre-modern position does not change. The establishment of the modern state and all of its problematics are imbued with a power that stems from overtly religious ideologies and overtly spiritual concerns. Classical and modern may indeed have different characteristics, but religion and politics do not disentangle their spiritual origins with the onset of modernity.

In the largest section of the book the authors present analyses of various aspects of the nexus. The ubiquitous nature of contemporary political religions is demonstrated. The essay on “Radicalization of Islamists in Indonesia” provides a case study of political resistance framed in a religiosity that is the single alternative to rule by powerful governments that have the interests of capital and employ religion in an instrumental manner. This contest is not a doctrinal dispute, but rather a dispute over resources and access to power, framed in a religiosity that is precisely our problem with the nexus. And when faith-based organizations take on the role of citizens’ welfare, in economic terms, we see the rise of religious influence, and the further entrenchment of the confluence of religion and politics, when policy-making and policy solutions are left in the hands of religious leaders. Several essays look at nation-building or political reconstruction. Despite the different geographical and historical lineages of the nations in question, it can be seen that all have in common the intractable nature of the nexus in question.

We conclude the book by discussing the persistence of our politics/religion nexus. In this persistence, we conclude that political religion will mark the beginning of the new millennium in a number of ways. Polities around the world maintain the sacralized view of politics. All of the points characteristic of political religions remain strong in both policy and ideology. Political decision-makers frame their questions as sacred ones: “national lands” being invaded by barbarians, the holy sepulchre of capitalism must remain even with all of its failures, and organized religion continues to act as moral arbiter with a noted lack of critique of government policies. Our masters then, have all of the gods on their side.

Works Cited

Ali, T. 2003. *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*. London: Verso.

Badiou, A. 2012. *Philosophy for Militants*. London: Verso.

—. 2012a. *The Rebirth of History*. London: Verso.

Bauman, Z. 1993. *Postmodern Ethics*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.

Berryman, P. 1987. *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Bosteels, B. 2012. *The Actuality of Communism*. London: Verso.

Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Colebatch, H. K. 2009. "Governance as a Conceptual Development in the Analysis of Policy." *Critical Policy Studies*. 3 (1): 58-67.

Figes, O. and B. Kolonitskii. 1999. *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Foucault, M. 1984. *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by R Hurley. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.

—. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Edited by C. Gordon. Translated by C. Gordon, L. Marshall, J. Mepham and K. Soper. Brighton, UK: Harvester Press.

Gentile, E. 1996. *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Griffin, R. 2006. *Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion*. London: Routledge.

Harvey, D. 2007. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Huntington, S. P. 1997. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, Simon & Schuster.

Imre, R., and Jose, J. 2010. "Religious and Political Violence: Globalising Syncretism and the Governance State." *Religion, State and Society*. 38: 153-168.

Miller, H. F. and C. J. Fox. 2007. *Postmodern Public Administration*. Rev. ed. Reprint. New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India.

Rashid, S. , ed 1997. *The Clash of Civilizations? Asian Responses*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Voegelin, E. 1986. *The Political Religions*. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press.

Zizek, S. 2012. "A Modest Plea for Enlightened Catastrophism." *ABC Religion and Ethics*. 11 July 2012. Accessed 10 March 2013. http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/07/11/3543824.html.

PART II

THE RELIGION OF POLITICS: FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEXUS

CHAPTER TWO

ON KEEPING RELIGION OUT OF POLITICS

STEPHEN A. CHAVURA

Introduction

Recently the British philosopher Mary Warnock published her own contribution to the current skirmish between secularists and religionists regarding the rationality and utility of religion; Warnock's (2010) contribution was entitled, *Dishonest to God: On Keeping Religion out of Politics*. I have no idea how seriously Warnock takes the subtitle of her book, but many contributors to the debate over religion and public life take it very seriously indeed (Cf. most recently Blackford 2012, *passim*).[1] There is no shortage of activists, philosophers, political scientists, journalists, and biologists who call for the "separation of religion and politics". This is a relatively new demand by advocates of so-called secular politics, for the traditional terminology of choice was a "separation of church and state" or a "secular state". The French term *laïcité* connotes a system, educational and governmental, not controlled by priests or the church. The English ecclesiastical term word "laity" ultimately derives from the same Greek word that the French *laïcité* takes its meaning from, λάος: "the people", as opposed to the clergy. The terms "separation of church and state" and *laïcité* posited two institutions, relatively clearly defined, which would inevitably overlap, but were not meant to usurp the other's rightful spheres of influence, that is not to *interfere* with or *trespass* upon one another (Hamburger 2002; Bowen 2007, 6-21; McLeod 2000, 52-80).

The problem with agreements to honour borders is the borders themselves are contestable, and the agreement to honour borders in the abstract becomes as much a source of conflict as it was supposed to be a source of peace. So as Europe passed through the 19th Century the state expanded its functional borders to include education, welfare, and hospitals; indeed, the expansion of the state over the last two hundred years is very much a story of the contraction of the church as the settled administrator of educational, welfare, and health institutions (McLeod 2000). We have been left with two institutions, the church and the state, whose functional borders are in dispute on more fronts now than ever before. For example, during the Medieval period there were skirmishes between theologians, kings, and popes regarding who ultimately owns (*dominion*) land and material possessions, as opposed to who is able to use them (*usus*); not to mention controversies over the immediate source of royal power: was it *directly* from God or *indirectly* from God *via* the church (Tierney 1964; O'Donovan and O'Donovan. 1999, Parts 2 and 3)? The answers to the questions were crucial, and they often led history's greatest minds down recondite paths of Scriptural exegesis: If Christ is sinless then the whole world must be the dominion of the church; for unless Christ himself owns the whole world his destruction of the herd of pigs would have been an assault on another's dominion, which is a sin. But Christ is sinless; thus, Christ owns the world, and the See of Peter, as his representative…*QED* (Cf. Marsilius 1956, II.3)!

---

[1] Even while writing this chapter I received an invitation from the Macquarie University Atheist League to attend a symposium on "how to disentangle religion and politics and advance secularism in Australia".

Although the question of who had ultimate authority in worldly affairs was contentious, nobody really thought to question the notion that the king was responsible for taxation and security, domestic and foreign, and the church was responsible for education, alms, and health. Even less contentious was whether political discussion, policy, and law derive their sustenance from church dogma: indeed they had to, or at least could not be in stark opposition to it:

> For if justice is a spiritual property and a perfection of soul and not of body, then it will rest with the spiritual power to judge concerning such justice; and earthly and bodily power will have no capacity to judge concerning it unless it does so by virtue of (a delegated) spiritual power. And so all imperial laws and those of the earthly power must be subordinated to the canons of the church, so that they may derive strength and also firmness from them (Giles of Rome [c.1301] 1999, 370).

Such was the accepted wisdom in the Middle Ages.

Things are, of course, very different today, and the changing nature of religion and the state has made the terms "separation of Church and State" and "secular state" more contentious than ever. As well as the state increasing its borders the current meaning of "religion" has changed, having little to do with the common use of that word up until the seventeenth century and in many cases well into the nineteenth century. It has become a remarkably broad term to denote any belief in a transcendent reality or system of behavior linked with a worldview, as was established in the US Supreme court in the case of *Torcaso v. Watkins* (1961), which recognized secular humanism as a religion. Prior to the seventeenth century it tended to denote a fairly defined set of rules or customs linked to a particular mode of piety: there was the Anglican religion, the Catholic religion, countless Dissenting religions, the Hindu religion; few spoke of "religion" as a universal category linking myriad particulars (Cf. Smith 1991 [1962], Ch. 2; Tregenza 2013). This was still largely true for the use of "religion" into the nineteenth century. Thus, when people spoke of a "religion" they often meant a particular church, and by "Church and State" they meant the influence of the clergy in government and or the influence of the government over church polity and doctrine. When people spoke of a separation of church and state they referred to the ideal of the church and its clergy not violating the proper functioning of the state, and of the state not violating the proper functioning of the church and the conscience of individual believers. In England and Western Europe the emphasis tended more to be placed on the state not interfering with the church as an institution in its doctrine and government. In America the emphasis tended to be more on the state not violating the consciences of individual religionists. In this way the idea of a separation between the church and the state took on slightly different flavours, largely owing to America's rejection of the idea of "the church" as a single, recognized institution: there was no church, just individuals and their congregations (Chadwick 1971; Dreisbach 2002).

Today calls for a separation of church/religion and state tend to be fairly diffuse in their meaning; demanding a total absence of religious voices in the public sphere, law and policy not explicitly or motivationally based on religious reasons or sentiments, the political arena as a clergy-free zone, and the state not funding any religious causes or institutions (Chavura 2011). Proponents of this program see themselves as continuing within the liberal tradition as it has emerged over the last three hundred years. Indeed, the whole idea of a separation of church and state, as opposed to the subordination of the church to the state or *vice versa*, is quintessentially liberal, and when we offer normative discourse on separating the church from the state we are entering into a liberal discourse. For example, despite recent calls for the separation of religion and politics, it has become a truism to say that it is impossible to eliminate religion from politics. Not so much in the sense that political concepts historically have taken their shape and substance from religious or theological concepts (Cf. Schmitt 1985: 33), but because both religion and politics are human dispositions and activities and, both being part of the human condition, they will inevitably interact, like conversation over the dinner table. It is when we seriously try to envision a program of removing religion from politics that we discover how liberal we are.

Presumably it would be the state removing religion from politics rather than religion removing itself, and so coercion would need to be as strong and pervasive to the degree that religion stubbornly finds myriad ways of influencing politics. Incorrigible religionists could not be trusted to hold office in political or legal institutions; the education system would need to be purged of any content that could plausibly promote religion and religious belief; citizens would have to be subjected to religiosity tests to ensure that religious beliefs and motives do not influence elections; religious institutions would have to be tightly controlled so as not to influence the general population, corrupting the citizenry. If civil society influences the political sphere, that is, the sphere of political decision, then civil society would need to be purged of religion for politics to be purely secular. All of this could be done; indeed, the experience of religionists in communist countries throughout the twentieth-century would see it more as a bad memory than a thought experiment. But our instinctual apprehension to such a program of removing religion from politics serves to show that the separation of Church and State is an ideal meant to promote greater ideals such as freedom and equality, the very ideals so obviously plundered in the hypothetical program just described.

As soon as we admit that religion and politics cannot be wholly separated from one another, the question becomes what sort of relationship the two may legitimately have. It makes sense partially to look to the historic liberal tradition as a heuristic method because the whole idea of a separation between these realms was adopted by and developed within this tradition. Indeed, it was the various models of church-state practiced in the medieval and early-modern periods against which Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Jefferson formulated their ideas.

Pre-Enlightenment models or ideal-types can be categorized as follows (O’Donovan and O’Donovan, eds. *passim*):

1. *Church over state*: The state is absolutely bound to enforce the moral and religious teachings of the church. Though the church has no direct coercive power whatsoever, it has the right to absolve believers of their duty of obedience to governments that shirk the church’s authority.

2. *State over church*: At its strongest, the state has the sovereign power to determine the religion of the nation, thus the Westphalian right: *cuis regio, eius religio*. In its strongest Hobbesian formulation the state has the right to determine all matters of church doctrine and polity.
3. *State with church*: Like 2 above, the interactive model rose mainly out of the Reformation and holds that both institutions have their authority directly from God, thus, neither is dependent upon the other for its authority. Nonetheless, the state is bound to take an interest in the *cura religionis* and must enforce the national religion on all subjects. Yet neither institution is thought to dominate over the other, as in the other two models.

Although these ideal-types all differ in their relation of church to state, they all agree on their relation of church-state to nation, that is, they all take for granted the legitimacy of enforcing religion upon subjects and citizens. It is this to which the Enlightenment church-state separation advocates were responding.

Locke's *Letter concerning Toleration* (1689) was written against "men striving for power and empire over one another" (Locke 1947, 21). The whole *Letter* is a series of (often theological) arguments against any power of the state to coerce religious adherence (Cf. Waldron 2002; and the contrasting view of Tate 2013). Locke's arguments are often theological in that they begin with a particular (to be specific, protestant Arminian) conception of God as concerned with people's internal beliefs and their free assent to the message of salvation. Ultimately he argues that there is a kind of absurdity in coercing religion, for "God will not save men against their wills" (Locke 1947, 37). Further, Locke argues that "it appears not that God has ever given any such authority to one man over another, as to compel anyone to his religion" (25). Magisterial coercion is futile for the magistrate's power "consists only in outward force…but true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind" (26). Furthermore, if a single religion was enforced upon a nation, given the multiplicity of religions, what would be the chances that it would be the right one? (27). Not only can a magistrate not determine the doctrine of the church (as Hobbes would have) but he cannot pick which pre-existing church to foist upon the people, for he has no special knowledge of which church is correct (Locke 1947, 39-40).

Locke offers a summary conclusion of the whole *Letter* of which I quote only in part:

> The sum of all we drive at is that every man may enjoy the same rights that are granted to others. Is it permitted to worship God in the Roman manner? Let it be permitted to do it in the Geneva form also…Let no man's life or body, or house, or estate, suffer any manner of prejudice upon these accounts (Locke 1947, 62).

What we see here is that Locke is wholly concerned with the imposition by the state of a particular religion upon the citizens. This also means he is concerned with religious forces taking over the reins of state and imposing a religion on the citizens. Put another way, he is concerned with religious freedom. It is about displacing the magistrate's right, even duty, to attach his coercive powers to a particular church, thus denying nonconformity. The separation of Church and State refers to a time when the two institutions were *not* separated, that is, when the coercive power of the state was used to enforce a religion upon nations. The opposite of this tradition is exactly what Locke is advocating: the loosening of the state's coercive rights from religion. Thus, if Locke's *Letter* is the classic statement of separation of church and state then the nature of such separation is religious liberty and freedom from religion only in the sense of freedom from state-imposed religious observance.

The second *locus classicus* of the idea of a separation between religion and the state is Thomas Jefferson's recommendation of a wall of separation between the church and the state. Jefferson's preoccupation was ensuring that religion remained free and uncoerced. His reasons were essentially Lockean and, therefore, for the most part theological: true religion comes from conviction, and conviction cannot be coerced. The essence of Jefferson's views on religion and the state were contained in his 1777 Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom:

> no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods; or shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities (Jefferson 1999, 391).

In his famous *Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association* (1802) he wrote the words that would become so important in post-WWII American

Supreme Court decisions.[2] Again we see that the premises upon which he builds his wall are first order theological propositions about God's expectations of his rational creatures:

> religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions [and should] "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between church and State (Jefferson 1999, 397).

Locke and Jefferson were concerned with religious freedom; freedom from state-church control. But how helpful are Locke and Jefferson today in liberal democracies characterized by social pluralism? Both Locke and Jefferson believed in a polity that was founded on what we would call religious presuppositions. For Locke this was natural law as an expression of divine will; for Jefferson it was natural rights endowed upon all by the Deity.[3] In continuity with political thought since Plato, Locke and Jefferson believed in a state grounded on metaphysics, indeed theology.

Twentieth-century liberal thought, on the other hand, has often rejected the legitimacy of any metaphysical or comprehensive foundations for law and legislation. Before the twentieth-century a broad Christian ethos in politics was not considered control but a reflection of the nation. What constitutes control in a pluralist liberal democracy? For example, do religious politicians, lobby groups, and voting blocs constitute a form of religious control or domination over politics? Conversely, would it constitute state domination over religious institutions if such institutions were no longer permitted to discriminate based on religion, morality, or sexuality? In the first case religionists would simply say that they are exercising their democratic rights, and therefore their activity is not domination any more than other interest group activity. In the second instance the state may say that it is not exercising arbitrary, self-seeking control over religious institutions, but merely doing its job of ensuring that people's rights are not violated.

---

[2] Namely beginning with *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947). For church and state in US jurisprudence see Eastland 2005; Patrick and Long 1999; Greenawalt, 2006; Davis 2010.

[3] See Locke's lectures on the law of nature delivered at Oxford University between 1663-4. His view that reason does not establish moral laws but merely discovers them, which have their origin in the will of God and provide the foundation for all law, also played a significant role in his *Second Treatise of Government* and especially his *Letter concerning Toleration*, in which he refuses to extend toleration to atheists because they reject the existence of the only entity upon which laws can be grounded. See "Essays on the Law of Nature", in Locke 1997, 81, 113, 120. For Jefferson's rational creator and his political ideas in general see Jayne 1997.

The notion of "control" or "domination" hinges on the prior concept of "arbitrariness", but "arbitrariness" itself is a concept that only makes sense if there is prior agreement on what is not arbitrary, that is, what constitutes a good reason for coercion (Pettit 1997, 55-8, 63, 174-5, 184-5, 230-1; Barry 1965, 306). Thus, the bounds of religious activity in the state and vice versa are determined by concepts that by their very nature are contestable. It seems that we cannot in good conscience even attempt to pry religion apart from politics, nor can we hope to have much agreement regarding the limits of influence they may have on one another. A good example of this is the ongoing debate on religious motivation and justification in politics carried on by various writers working roughly within a liberal-democratic tradition (See Audi and Wolterstorff 1996; Audi 2000; Greenawalt 2006, 1995; Smith 2010; Habermas 2008). Furthermore, in continuity with the concerns of Locke and Jefferson not to foist any particular mode of worship on predominantly religious community, current liberal theorists argue that, given the fact of social pluralism, it is illegitimate to base law and policy on any sort of comprehensive doctrine, religious or otherwise. In other words, public reason may have been quite legitimately theological (though non-sectarian) in earlier Western societies not so affected by modernity (Cf. Greenawalt 1995: 9), but now, in an age of pluralism, public reason must thin out even more, focusing on the bare essentials of peace, efficiency, and justice (Rawls 1951; Rawls 1993, Lecture VI; Rawls 1997).

But is this public reason pressed a step too far? Can there be such a thing as public reason, that is, a discourse unhooked from controversial metaphysical and religious propositions and suspended wholly on liberal democratic essentials, or propositions essential to the sustenance of a society of free and equals? If such a discourse exists then it has yet to be discovered, and, indeed, our strongest candidates for public discourse tend to beget the most controversy. The language of human rights and the harm principle are the most obvious candidates for a public normative discourse, mainly because they both speak of themselves as based on the human condition considered very abstractly: a rational animal capable of flourishing and suffering. Yet, if these discourses are truly public in the sense that they presuppose no theories of human nature that are unreasonable to reject, how is it that they generate as much, if not more, controversy than they settle?

Consider for example, debates over same-sex marriage, abortion, recreational drugs, freedom of speech, or the war on terror; such debates are not conducted with one side using esoteric arguments and the other using public discourses such as the harm principle or human rights, both sides of the debate use the same discourses. Opponents of same-sex marriage claim that it will devalue the institution of marriage, thus perpetuating the trend of family breakdown and all its social consequences. Proponents of same-sex marriage say that excluding gays from marriage confirms social stigmatization, perpetuating disadvantages—psychological and health—in the gay community. This is not to mention the human rights factor that also fuels the debate: children have a right to a mother and a father; gays have a right to enter into that institution still considered by the majority of people as the exemplar of a legitimate intimate partnership. Much like Hobbes' *lex naturalis*, the harm principle and human rights have as much potential for conflict as they do resolution (Smith 2006; Smith 2010 91-2, 94, 105). This is not even to raise equally vexatious public debates such as abortion rights and freedom of speech.

The problem is that the candidates for public concepts, or concepts upon which to hook our public discourse—equality, rights, harm, autonomy—are deeply contested because they are all deeply metaphysical. They all presuppose some ideal of what it is to be *truly* human, and when the ideal fails to obtain and the failure can be traced to human agency, we say that rights are violated, harms are committed, autonomy is stifled, and equality is denied. In this way the call to purge religion from politics, as well as being an affront to the liberal mind when we take seriously the means necessary for it to obtain, fails to appreciate the inescapably metaphysical nature of political norms in the first place. Of course, some may address this by invoking Kantian notions of norms being expressions of reason; thus, to follow norms (and force others to follow them) is simply to cast off heteronomy and become truly autonomous (Cf. Rawls 1971, *passim*). This may be true, but it is hardly uncontroversial.

So what becomes of the uneasy relation between religion and politics? Sociologists and political scientists are very sceptical of the once canonical "secularization thesis", that is, the theory that with the growth of the state, the market, and scientific knowledge, religion would recede more and more. The theory seems to hold true for much of Western Europe (although the influx of Muslim immigrants over the last five decades may be a game-changer), but not at all for the US (Casanova 1994; Fox 2008; Hanson 2006; Jenkins 2007; Taylor 2007). Thus, there is good reason to think that religion is going to be around for a long time. Politics will not