God help *anybody* who runs for president!

1 My title is humorous, blasphemous, and prayerful.  The humor is in the oft-remarked fact that the presidency of the United States tops the list of the world's impossible jobs.  The blasphemy is in the doleful implication that you are doomed from the first day you sit in the Oval Office to make huge mistakes: nobody can rescue you, not even God.  (Said Truman, "The toughest part of this job is that you don't get to make any little mistakes.")  And the prayerfulness is my gut response to the biblical wisdom that "with God, all things are possible" (Matthew 19:27).

 2 Power hates rivals, and loves vacuums as opportunities for expansion. Cynics assume that self-expansion is politicians’ motive for “God talk” in their speeches, but Mike Huckabee has countered their assumption: it turns out that his politicking was an expansion of his pulpit, to which God called him to preach not the love of power but the power of love.  Politics can be a religious "vocation" (which is Latin for "calling," God’s calling a person to some specific occupation I the service of God, humanity, and the good earth). So, he says, his reason for *not* running for president is "spiritual."

3      Huckabee's religion is death to fat egos.  It requires him - against power-lust, ego-mania - to see himself as "wretched" and "a worm," as he says of himself in singing "Amazing Grace."  (We all *say* it when we sing "Amazing Grace," and some of us *mean* it: to us, grace - God's forgiveness through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ - is "amazing," and the very word a "sweet sound.")  We Christians are to be *suspicious of power*, for it unjustly killed Jesus, who in the power of love calls us to love God, our neighbor, our selves, and even our enemies.

4       Jesus was squashed to death between "the powers," religious (the Temple) & political (Rome, in Pilate): Christians should be, as he was, suspicious of both.  This double suspicion developed in Europe and Britain in the two centuries before the birth of America.  It created the space, in America, for the development of free associations (religious congregations, lodges, political parties, societies for the promotion of this and the protection of that) of "the people," who both participate in and stand over against the power-institutions of both government ("state") and religion ("church").  Underlying America's contribution to world politics, "the separation of church and state" (the freedom of each from the other), lies the people's freedom to create movements and institutions appropriate to their needs and hope without falling into anarchy.

5       These mediating movements and institutions, checking the powers of both "state" and "church," define "the people" as other than and superior to both political and religious institutions.  Our Declaration of Independence says our rights derive from God, not from the King.  Our Constitution begins "We the people," not "I the king" or "I the priest."  Not so in the Muslim world, where sharia has choked off uprisings of the people and efforts to build mediating institutions.  "The Arab spring" is more apt to be followed by winter than by summer.

6      Francis Fukuyama (whom I remember as a small child running around my Manhattan office when his mother Tosh brought him to the national office of the United Church of Christ to visit his father Yosh) well describes the dilemma of human power.  The best form of government would be a good emperor always followed by a good emperor; the worst form of government is a bad emperor.  Since the former is, historically, only a dream (though in the Lord's Prayer that the rule of *God* come it is a reality of faith), the best form of government available to us finite and sinful creatures is the mess called democracy, the mess that is the best mix of freedom and order.  We Americans can strive to model it, but it cannot be imposed except in rare instances (as in Japan '45) of "unconditional surrender."

7       God leaves us politically free (to use a biblical phrase) "to work out our salvation with fear and trembling." God's grace provides us, individually and together, with always a new start toward becoming truly human.  But God does not play favorites.

Willis E. Elliott, 6.1.11

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