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<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2009/04/religion_in_power_bad_for_the_people_worse_for_religion.html>

**Religion in Power: Bad for the People, Worse for Religion**

*How would you respond to radical Muslim clerics who are calling for expansion of Islamic law across the entire federal republic of Pakistan. Should any nation be governed by religious rules or authorities?*

1.....Government "by religious rules or authorities" is bad for people and worse for religion. In believing this, we Americans are more radical than the most radical Muslims. Indeed, in comparison with us, "radical Muslim clerics" are extreme conservatives.

2.....Throughout history and around the world, the OLD way of government was dual-power: the militarily successful claimed to rule by divine right (or, in the case of Confucian China, "under heaven"). Ruler-supporting priests embodied the vertical dimension of power. Occasionally, prophets (especially in Israel) challenged this (un)holy alliance, but usually to their doom.

3.....The Atlantic Ocean barrier made possible, in America, the emergence of the NEW way of government. Immigrants from Europe left behind both king and priest. Our first President rebuffed those who wanted to call him king, and our Constitution's First Amendment separated the power institutions of "church" and "state" from each other. Result? Both prospered, to the benefit of "we the people" and of the world.

4....Yes, "the benefit of the world." Prophets, religious and secular, were no longer victims of king + priest, but were free to criticize both establishments and to rally "we the people" for CHANGE. Historians of government agree that this "separation of church and state" as institutions is America's contribution to the history of government. It is a gift we can best give by example, next by persuasion, almost never by coercion (Japan, 1945, being an exception).

5.....The power-triangle of government possibilities is king-rule, priest-rule, and "people-rule." The third I have put in quotation marks, for it is the English translation of the Greek word transliterated as "democracy." We Americans have a world-travel bag marked "democracy," and inside it is everything we mean by the word, including the Anglo-American understanding of law, which includes more extensive *citizen-freedoms* than ever before known in history.

6.....The British Empire spread British law with its implicit freedoms far and wide. Pakistan's constitution and long democratic traditions enshrined that British heritage. But in 1999, by military coup, General Musharraf declared himself president; in 2007 he suspended the constitution, sacked chief justice Chaudhry, and ruled by decree until, under threat of impeachment, he resigned in 2008. This year, parliament yielded to Taliban pressure and recognized Muslim law (sharia) as replacement for Pakistani law in the Taliban-dominated Swat region. Widespread protest has invigorated the forces of Pakistani law and returned Chaudhry to the office of chief justice. To resist the "expansion of Islamic law across...Pakistan," pressure is increasing to rejuvenate the civil judicial system so that it can compete with sharia's speedy and effective (though, in Western eyes, barbarous) jurisprudence.

7.....Of all the world's legal systems, Islam's sharia is the most change-resistant and the greatest threat to personal freedoms. As one who taught Islam in an American university, I am sad to have to say that sharia is the world's greatest threat to the spread of America's political gift to the world, the separation of church and state. "Sharia" means "pathway," and there is no human activity it does not cover in its minute defining of what pleases Allah: no freedoms, only "submission" (an English translation of the Arabic word, "islam"). President Obama is correct that America is not an enemy of Islam, but our laws and sharia are inescapably enemies.

8.....What is most ominous, in Islam's confrontation with the non-Islamic world, is Islam-sharia's teaching that only sharia-governed Muslim countries are "dar es Islam,"
countries at *peace*. All other countries - even Muslim countries, including Pakistan - are *war*-territory ("dar es harb"). America is war-territory, and 9/11 was an act of war in the eyes not just of jihadists, Islamists, al-Qaida, "Muslim extremists," but of what has been essential Islam. My wording, "has been," expresses my prayerful hope for the emergence of an Islam moderated by the realities of world changes in the past thousand years.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  APRIL 20, 2009; 11:59 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:                       
PREVIOUS:**[**THE COMING EVANGELICAL FUTURE**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/leith_anderson/2009/04/the_coming_evangelical_future.html)**| NEXT:**[**THE PRESIDENT AND THE CHRISTIAN ETHIC**](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/susan_k_smith/2009/04/the_president_and_the_christian_ethic.html)

**Comments**

**Please report offensive comments below.**

i believe individuals who happen to be muslim share the innate desires for peace, love and harmony, but,

HELP!!!!

i've been asking this question over and over (apologies to those who've seen it) on various threads, but still no answer:

are there verses you can quote from the koran (that were not later superseded by the ugly medina verses) and hadith that promote tolerance, fairness, equality, freedom of religion, self-determination etc...?

please, i would really like to know.

**POSTED BY: WALTER-IN-FALLSCHURCH | APRIL 27, 2009 12:16 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Well said, Dr. Elliot. The rightness of the Obama administration in this and other matters is further clarified by the utter wrongness of the Bush administration on nearly everything.

The coming of the Taliban and allied insurgents in Pakistan is just about the worst fate imaginable - religion-crazed clerics and medieval dummies with a nuclear arsenal at their disposal.

And folks thought Iran was bad! No comparison between these two as regards the imminent danger looming on a global scale.

Supporting the corrupt military dictatorship of the Musharraf regime is now bringing the 'wrath of Allah' down on Pakistan and beyond. And of course there was even a time when we supported the Taliban in Afghanistan.

See the article below regarding the covert relationship between elements of the Pakistani government and the Taliban.

Political expediency makes for strange bedfellows......and the list of our political choices coming back to haunt us is a very long one. For some odd reason, the USA generally tends to support right-wing military dictatorships wherever possible.

We seldom default to supporting theocracies, so I guess that's a good thing.....except in the case of Saudi Arabia, of course.

As an aside, we see the NRA in the USA in their strongest position in years, with the renewal of the assault weapons ban now dead in the water thanks to democrats in Congress demurring from fear of the political fallout.

But then, we are the world's foremost arms dealer, so sometimes it's hard to know which friends will ultimately become enemies down the road. And I don't foresee cuts in the defense spending budget anytime in the future - although I think we're well over our credit card limit about now.

Best regards......

[**http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/26/world/asia/26tribal.html?partner=rss**](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/26/world/asia/26tribal.html?partner=rss)

**POSTED BY: PERSIFLAGE | APRIL 25, 2009 11:18 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Thanks, commenters, for your string of thoughtful contributions. I am refreshed and become hopeful when people agree or disagree with me: I am depressed and worried by silence.

Silence precedes divorce, the second silence.
Silence precedes war and death, the second silence.

While the active opposite of love is hate, the passive opposite is indifference, not caring, not participating, "dropping out" (which in the '60s some thought a virtue).

The root problem with dropping out is that there is no out: God made us relational-responsible creatures. If we drop out, we get dropped in on and taken over.

Congratulations on caring, which combines love (affection for your fellow human beings) and justice (opposition to whatever impedes the blossoming and fruition of our common humanity under God).

**POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | APRIL 25, 2009 9:10 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Amen, Rev. Elliott!

**POSTED BY: NORRIEHOYT | APRIL 24, 2009 8:56 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Who cares what's bad for religion? What matters is what's good for people.
Religious people who feel the need to force their religion on other people are bad for themselves and for other people.
Religious people who have their religion and keep it themselves in their own way are good for themselves.
Religious people who have their religion and are thus motivated to help other people are good for themselves and other people.
Religion, by itself and with no people, doesn't exist and is thus irrelevant.

**POSTED BY: DAVIDBARRON | APRIL 24, 2009 6:25 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

gjkbear

You have a skewed angle on things.

Christians were are the forefront of the free the slaves movement. Slavery was wrong , and there was a cultural aspect to it that we can't really judge. Bush was a average Pres at best, but you seem to be judging his soul and intent. What did he steal? Did he lie or was he just mistaken? Torture? what do you think happens during war time? tiddly winks?

As far as gays go- they pale in comparison to slavery or prejudice against blacks or even women's rights. They can be judged by their BEHAVIOR, which is neither equal to a man woman relationship nor can it ever be.

What I notice now is that when anyone speaks out against the great Messiah Obama, the left, or people like you, are just as hypocritical as the people that supported Bush in his time.

Look in the mirror dude, you are full of hypocrisy.

**POSTED BY: COUNTERWW | APRIL 24, 2009 3:22 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

PHJesusWarrior - For years you had religious conservatives lobbying from the pulpit to keep slavery (it was in the bible that people should be slaves) - against woman's equality (everyone just knew that the woman belonged in the home, barefoot, pregnant and above all silent on any matter that had to do with politics - Then it was interracial marraiage - then something else... Now it is the horrors of the gay agenda. I notice you didn't mention any of the conservative pastors who daily preached hate and violence- calling anyone who dared speak out against Bush - a terrorist or UnAmerican. I am unaware of any plan to do away with blood donors or universal donors. We lived for 8 years with a man who professed to be Christian but then lived a decidely unchristian livestyle. He prayed, but mostly in name only. He tortured, lied, stole from the people and that was Biblical??? We have someone in the white house now who does not seem to be a Christian in name only; but who actually lives a life that he believes Jesus would live. There is just no pleasing some people.

**POSTED BY: GJKBEAR | APRIL 23, 2009 3:27 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

It does not take a person to go to war zones to find religious intolerance. Here in Houston it exist for conservatives especially in the churches where you find Ralph White, Rudy Rasmus, Les Rose, Ralph Douglas West, and other Obama supporters from the pulpit. They have organized a campaign that hurts all Americans to include eliminating blood donors of even universal donors. They use their activity to receive grants and other public monies. Undue influence of political leaders such as Shelia Jackson-Lee, Houston mayor former Washington insider Bill White and others. The protection of Houston Police Department and financial support of gay coalitions and race baiting organizations.

**POSTED BY: PHJESUSWARRIOR7 | APRIL 22, 2009 9:37 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

at the temple of holy freedom.

sun day morning,the public mass are revelantly siting down,every body got freedom cap on the head every body got freedom beads in the hand every body praising the holy freedom,the song of the songs freedom is chanting freedom bells are blasting\*

the shrine of jefferson on the right side,the shrine of washington on the left side while saint democtateous on top of the altar,

heavenly insense is all over the place,crops of strangled kings by the rotten entrails of the priests are all over the walls,the renaisance indeed.

george bush carrying the democratic bible while the prince of peace blair carrying the british magna charta .

free at last!

**POSTED BY: MONO1 | APRIL 22, 2009 3:25 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

WILLIS E ELLIOTT

Do you think that the goal of islam thru sharia law is the complete domination of the whole world whether thru armed conflict, terror, the manipulations of the inherent openess of an open society governed thru a democratic process or any other way that can be conjured up, so to speak?

You say that you taught islam in an American university, I would like to ask a question: I have been told that in islam it is taught that one shouldn't lie but that it is alright to lie for allah or for the advancement of islam, or words to this effect, is this true?

Just because a majority of people or a majority of voters or a majority of representatives vote in a law or a set of laws does not mean that that law or set of laws is right, it may make it legal, but that does not mean that it is right.

God did not become One of us for us to set up a theocracy, the state should not interfere with people's beliefs unless that belief is to hurt others and the church should not interfere with the state unless the state tries to stifle people's God-given rights.

Take care, be ready.

Sincerely, Thomas Paul Moses Baum.

**POSTED BY: THOMASBAUM | APRIL 22, 2009 1:17 PM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

Religion has been raising human consciousness for centuries. Whatever man is now, whatever little consciousness he has, the whole credit goes to religion. Politics with out religion has been a curse, a calamity; and whatever is ugly in humanity, politics is responsible for.
The fact is that Politics interfere with the religion and for material gains vilify religion.
Writes John Esposito:
"For more than four decades governments formulated policy in the midst of a superpower rivalry that defined the globe and the future in terms of the visible ideological and military threat posed by the Soviet Union. In the aftermath of the cold war, the fall of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of communism have created a "threat vacuum" that has given rise to a search for new enemies. For some Americans the enemy is the economic challenge the Japanese or the European Community represent. For others it is an Islamic world whose 1 billion Muslims form a majority in more than 48 countries and a rapidly growing minority in Europe and America. Some view Islam as the only ideological alternative to the West that can cut across national boundaries, and perceiving it as politically and culturally at odds with Western society, fear it; others consider it more a basic demographic threat...........
The causes of the resurgence are many and differ from country to country, but common catalysts and concerns are identifiable. Secular nationalism (whether in the form of liberal nationalism, Arab nationalism, or socialism) has not provided a sense of national identity or produced strong and prosperous societies. The governments in Muslim countries-- mostly nonelected, authoritarian, and dependent on security forces--have been unable to establish their political legitimacy. They have been blamed for the failure to achieve economic self-sufficiency, to stem the widening gap between rich and poor, to halt widespread corruption, to liberate Palestine, to resist Western political and cultural hegemony. Both the political and the religious establishments have come under criticism, the former as a westernized, secular elite overly concerned with power and privilege, and the latter (in Sunni Muslim nations) as leaders of the faithful who have been co-opted by governments that often control mosques and religious universities and other institutions".

**POSTED BY: SPARK1 | APRIL 22, 2009 11:16 AM****REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT**

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