

A Christian People Created a Secular Government

What's your reaction to President Obama's recent statements to the Muslim world that "the United States is not, and never will be, at war with Islam" and that "we do not consider ourselves a Christian nation"?

From my point of view as an evangelical-liberal Christian, President Obama's handling of the religion factor in domestic and foreign affairs has been flawless.

A few comments on the two statements.

Statement ONE:

"The United States is not, and never will be, at war with Islam."

1

The U.S. is a *nation*, Islam is a *religion*. The statement is non-symmetrical.

2

The legal structure of the U.S. and the political mentality of our people separates the structures of government ("state") and structures of religion ("church"). To war against any particular religion is, for us, inconceivable. Even if a "neo-con" administration were to trick us into such a war, it would have insufficient public support, and public rage would push for the President's impeachment.

3

The U.S. is a political *entity*, Islam is a *movement* with no controlling center. (The Arab League is only an ethnic group within Islam.) Again, non-symmetricality.

4

Even if at some time the U.S. were at war with a Muslim nation or even a group of Muslim nations, we would not be "at war with Islam": Obama is word-precise.

5

Lacking the experience and even the concept of *the separation of church and state*, most Muslims consider the U.S. a Christian nation on the model of Muslim nations. When we (foolishly) took over Iraq, it was, for most Muslims everywhere, a Christian nation on a "crusade" against a Muslim nation.

6

As a constitutional lawyer in the Anglo-American tradition, Obama knows that the U.S. is and always will be at *law-war* against sharia, Islamic law, which forbids freedoms assumed in the English-speaking world. The government of Pakistan has just yielded to Islamist pressure that a section of that country come under sharia, replacing Pakistani law. Muslim radicals insist that "dar es salam" (Muslim territorial dominance) is not satisfied until sharia completes the take-over. Until that time, a territory mainly inhabited by Muslims is still war territory ("dar es harb"), along with all the rest of the world.

Statement TWO:

"We do not consider ourselves a Christian nation."

1

This reinforces the critical difference between America (a mainly Christian people with a secular government) and Muslim nations (with their various mixes, but never a distinct separation, of religion and politics).

2

Correctly, the (1797) Treaty of Tripoli says (in the English version, not in the Arabic versions) that the U.S. government was not "founded" on the Christian religion. Again, our trying to communicate to a Muslim nation (here, Lybia) our separation of church and state. We needed that Muslim government to cooperate with us in stopping the Muslim pirates' depredations on our shipping.

3

Correctly, the U.S. has a record of supporting Muslims against Christians where the issue is justice. Most recently, providing diplomatic and military backing for Bosnia against Serbia.

4

As the only U.S. President ever to have lived in a Muslim nation and to have a Muslim name, Obama is *uniquely*

situated to get Muslim attention for improved relations between our nation (and people) and Muslim nations (and people). While a committed Christian, he is (wisely) so low-profile about it in his speech that, in a recent survey, only 45% of Americans identified his religion as Christian, and 10% thought him a Muslim.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | APRIL 13, 2009; 9:50 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:        

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Comments

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TO COLINNICHOLAS:

Yesterday, I wrote you extensively, but my comment has not appeared. (I'm still hoping it does.)

I have time now only to repeat the first paragraph:

"I talk (through my fingers) with many who imagine that they are using their minds in the service of reason. My counter-claim - which here I detail - is that they (like everybody else) are using reason to serve their mind's COHERENCE (i.e., comprehensive sense-making). Their claim of being more-rational-than-thou is self-congratulatory delusion."

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | APRIL 21, 2009 3:47 PM
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Talking about Mencken, here's his take on a few dead gods.

"Where is the graveyard of dead gods? What lingering mourner waters their mounds? There was a day when Jupiter was king of the gods, and any man who doubted his puissance was ipso-facto a barbarian and an ignoramus. But where in all the world is there a man who worships Jupiter today? And what of Huitzilopochtli? In one year - and it is no more than five hundred years ago - fifty thousand youths and maidens were slain in sacrifice to him. Today, if he is remembered at all, it is only by some vagrant savage in the depths of the Mexican forest. Huitzilopochtli, like many other gods, had no human father; his mother was a virtuous widow; he was born of an apparently innocent flirtation that she carried on with the sun. When he frowned, his father, the sun, stood still. When he roared with rage, earthquakes engulfed whole cities. When he thirsted he was watered with ten thousand gallons of human blood. But today Huitzilopochtli is as magnificently forgotten as Alien G Thurman.

Speaking of Huitzilopochtli recalls his brother Tezcatilpoca. Tezcatilpoca was almost as powerful ; he consumed twenty five thousand virgins a year.

Lead me to his tomb; I would weep, and hang a couronne des perles. But who knows where it is?"

POSTED BY: COLINNICHOLAS | APRIL 20, 2009 9:49 PM
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Edbyronadams;

you say;

"Perhaps the most common of all follies is to believe that anything can be proven untrue."

me;

Hi Ed. Not quite sure what you mean. Lots of things can be proved to be untrue. $2+2=5$ is untrue. I can prove it.

Maybe what your saying is that nobody can prove that there is NO god.

OK, I'm with you there. So what conclusion do you draw from that? It says nothing to me. Nobody can prove that there is no Tinkerbell either. You can't prove there are no invisible fairies at the bottom of my garden if I claim there are.

The proof lies with the person making the claim. If I say I have fairies at the bottom of my garden - then you have every right to say "prove it". If I make the claim I should be able to back it up with evidence.

Carl Sagan said that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. The claim that there is a skygod is an extraordinary claim, and there is no evidence.

That's really what Mencken is driving at; the palpably not true; but folks believe it anyway.

POSTED BY: COLINNICHOLAS | APRIL 20, 2009 9:40 PM

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"The most common of all follies," wrote H.L.Mencken, "is to believe passionately in the palpably not true. It is the chief occupation of mankind."

Perhaps the most common of all follies is to believe that anything can be proven untrue. Some controlled situations can be falsified, but the existence of the transcendent does not fit this category.

Jared Diamond on the "Evolution of Religion".<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th7CFye03gQ> . An interesting view although he misses Buddhism. I can't see that it has much of a tribal advantage.

POSTED BY: EDBYRONADAMS | APRIL 20, 2009 11:49 AM

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"The most common of all follies," wrote H.L.Mencken, "is to believe passionately in the palpably not true. It is the chief occupation of mankind."

In culture after culture, people believe that the soul lives on after death, that rituals can change the physical world and divine the truth, and that illness and misfortune are caused and alleviated by spirits, ghosts, saints, fairies, angels, demons, cherubims, djinns, devils and gods.

According to polls, more than a quarter of today's (1997) Americans believe in witches, almost half believe in ghosts, half believe in the devil, half believe that the book of Genesis is literally true, sixty-nine percent believe in angels, eighty-seven percent believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, and ninety-six percent believe in a god or a universal spirit. How does religion fit into a mind that one might have thought was designed to reject the palpably not true?"

The common answer - that people take comfort in the thought of a benevolent shepherd, a universal plan, or an afterlife -- is unsatisfying, because it only raises the question of why a mind would evolve to find comfort in beliefs it can plainly see are false. A freezing person finds no comfort in believing he is warm; a person face-to-face with a lion is not put at ease by the conviction that it is a rabbit.

What is religion? Like the psychology of the arts, the psychology of religion has been muddied by scholars' attempts to exalt it while understanding it. Religion cannot be equated with our higher, spiritual, humane, ethical yearnings (though it sometimes overlaps with them).

The Bible contains instructions for genocide, rape, and the destruction of families, and even the Ten Commandments, read in context, prohibit murder, lying, and theft only within the tribe, not against outsiders. Religions have given us stonings, witch burnings, crusades, inquisitions, jihads, fatwas, suicide bombers, abortion-clinic gunmen, and mothers who drown their sons so that they can be happily reunited in Heaven.

As Blaise Pascal wrote;"Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction."

"How The Mind Works" by Steven Pinker. pub.WWNorton & Co. 1997. p554-555.

POSTED BY: COLINNICHOLAS | APRIL 19, 2009 8:58 PM

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As far as we know there are no gods and never were. We can celebrate the wonder of existence without recourse to infantile superstitions. Sam Harris says it best;

"Man is manifestly not the measure of all things. The universe is shot through with mystery. The very fact of its being , and of our own, is a mystery absolute, and the only miracle worthy of the name. The consciousness that animates us is itself central to this mystery and the ground for any experience we might wish to call "spiritual." No myths need be embraced for us to commune with the profundity of our circumstance. No personal God need be worshiped for us to live in awe at the beauty and immensity of creation. No tribal fiction need be rehearsed for us to realize, one fine day, that we do, in fact, love our neighbors, that our happiness is inextricable from their own, and that our interdependence demands that people everywhere be given the opportunity to flourish. The days of our religious identities are clearly numbered. Whether the days of civilization itself are numbered would seem to depend , rather too much, on how soon we realize this."

Sam Harris. "The End of Faith" p.227.

POSTED BY: COLINNICHOLAS | APRIL 17, 2009 12:47 PM

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However, a war against the godless by the faithful is not inconceivable.

POSTED BY: EDBYRONADAMS | APRIL 17, 2009 9:53 AM

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