

Worthy Leaders' Two Humilities

Life would be easier—wouldn't it?—if we didn't need human leaders in either "state" or "church," and didn't need to suffer the successions from one leader to another. But we must somehow sail—in "church" and "state"—between lawless anarchy and freedomless tyranny, and the sailing takes skilled piloting.

The current "On Faith" question is, "How important are leadership styles and personalities of religious leaders to rank and file members of the faith and to public perception of those faiths?"

1.....The question implicitly invites religious leaders to ask themselves "How do I look to my people, and what does my faith look like to the general public?" Good question, but of third importance. Of second importance is the leader's faith, character, integrity, authenticity, quality. Of first importance is the leader's self-understanding as standing under the judgment and guidance of a superior—the source of the *primary* humility of worthy leaders of "state" as well as of "church."

2.....Worthy leaders' *secondary* humility is as servants of their people. As we human beings earn the right to speak by listening, leaders earn the right to lead by following. In Aristotle's description, the "polites" (i.e., citizen) is competent in the arts of both "ruling and being ruled in turn."

3.....In addition to believing that the leaderships of religion and government should be separate, *America's founders* assumed that any worthy leadership will be *humble in both senses*. Jefferson's Second Inaugural Address included both humilities: "I shall need all the indulgences which I have heretofore experienced from my constituents....I shall need too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life; who has covered our infancy with His providence and our riper years with His wisdom and power, and to whose goodness I ask you to join in supplication with me that He will so enlighten the minds of your servants, guide their counsels, and prosper their measures that whatsoever they do shall result in your good, and shall secure to you the peace, friendship, and approbation of all nations."

4.....Jefferson's affirmation of the primary humility of worthy leadership could not be clearer: Presidents of the United States are *secondary* leaders under the judgment and guidance of a superior, namely, the God of the Bible. Not deism's far-off-and-unconcerned deity, but the God who is with us—in "wisdom...power...goodness"--in our "infancy" and "our riper years." If we Americans are to expect this primary humility in our presidents, how much more are we to expect it in our pastors!

Finally, to address specifically the "On Faith" question:

a.....Since members expect their leaders to be worthy embodiments and exemplars of the faith as well as public personal symbols of its identity, the very being of the faith, its communal coherence, and its public image are all on trial and at risk in their "leadership styles and personalities."

b.....While unworthy leaders in "state" disgrace the state and its people, all the people live and deal with the disgrace. Clergy scandals can be even more consequential. (1) Since only *some* of the people of the "state" are involved, others may see a clergy misstep as further reason to have nothing to do with that faith or even with religion in general. (2) Hypocrisy in religious leaders is seen as *more offensive*, as the claims of piety are thought to be higher than the claims of politics. Long experience with clergy in basic and continuing education has me convinced that there are few frauds among them, but the few when exposed bring shame on the many.

c.....Our celebrity culture is a corrupting influence on all of us but is a special peril to religious leadership, whose internal markers of success (internal to the faith and to the leader) are increasingly at odds with the culture's external markers of fortune and fame.

d.....The "public perception" of any faith is more dependent on the daily lives of its members than on the public lives of its clergy. From living next to you, what do your neighbors think of your religion? What do you think of theirs?



Comments

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If you have something interesting to say, I think it is worth it. To be honest, since I have been posting here, my thoughts are a little clearer, and over all, I think I feel a little better about things. If you have even a touch of non-standard free-thinking in your heart, then it is going to be harder for you anywhere that you go, because you do not go along with the crowd.

Theologians are the "smart" people who tell everyone else what to believe. But if you have any curiosity at all, you are entitled to think it through, yourself.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | FEBRUARY 1, 2008 1:55 PM

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Daniel...

You can suggest questions...not that they will listen to you. At the bottom of the main page is a link for David Waters...contact him.

I am starting to wonder if it is worth while being a part of this forum, if you are non Christian or a branch off of it?

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | FEBRUARY 1, 2008 1:24 PM

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This essay was ok. This was a poorly formed question. I was not familiar with the 2 leaders named in the question. I think this question would be hard to answer. I wonder how they get the questions? I wish they would be a little better.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | FEBRUARY 1, 2008 11:43 AM

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

DZ

WHO has "an awfully muddy view of our own history"? I quoted you Jefferson (from his Second Inaugural Address), & you call it "nonsense"! Then you go on to talk about views held by immature Jefferson during his romantic period of fascination with the French philosophs before the disastrous French Revolution!

I do, however, have some mercy for you. In almost all his spare time, throughout his life, Jefferson was writing whatever came into his head. Result: Anybody can, in Jefferson's paper-legacy, happily find confirmation for almost any opinion.

PARKER

Thank you. I am in full agreement with you if you are not claiming that some of America's founders "didn't have or know of the Bible." Clearly, they all did. But I think you mean that America has subsequently been "enriched" by some who "didn't have or know of the Bible." That is true.

But then you speak of “many other sources of inspired truths besides scripture that undergird the bedrock foundations of our...nation.” I can accept this: “In the bedrock foundations of our nation, alongside scripture, are some inspired truths from the European and British Enlightenments.” (Some would add a few political ideas from the Iroquois Confederacy, but I think those were used by some—including Franklin—for confirmation of conclusions drawn from the Bible & the Greeks & Romans.) But (with the possible Iroquois exception), none of the Enlightenment figures influencing our founders in that bedrock were biblically ignorant.

My shorthand for “the American mind” of our founders is “Bible+Enlightenment.” And with you I celebrate all who have ever enriched, & all who continue to enrich, our pluralist America “under [the one] God.”

POSTED BY: WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | JANUARY 31, 2008 4:50 PM
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Pt. 3

The error seems not sufficiently eradicated, that the operations of the mind, as well as the acts of the body, are subject to the coercion of the laws. But our rulers can have authority over such natural rights only as we have submitted to them. The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God. The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg. If it be said, his testimony in a court of justice cannot be relied on, reject it then, and be the stigma on him. Constraint may make him worse by making him a hypocrite, but it will never make him a truer man. It may fix him obstinately in his errors, but will not cure them. Reason and free enquiry are the only effectual agents against error. Give a loose to them, they will support the true religion, by bringing every false one to their tribunal, to the test of their investigation. They are the natural enemies of error, and of error only. Had not the Roman government permitted free enquiry, Christianity could never have been introduced. Had not free enquiry been indulged, at the aera of the reformation, the corruptions of Christianity could not have been purged away. If it be restrained now, the present corruptions will be protected, and new ones encouraged. Was the government to prescribe to us our medicine and diet, our bodies would be in such keeping as our souls are now. Thus in France the emetic was once forbidden as a medicine, and the potatoe as an article of food. Government is just as infallible too when it fixes systems in physics. Galileo was sent to the inquisition for affirming that the earth was a sphere: the government had declared it to be as flat as a trencher, and Galileo was obliged to abjure his error. This error however at length prevailed, the earth became a globe, and Descartes declared it was whirled round its axis by a vortex. The government in which he lived was wise enough to see that this was no question of civil jurisdiction, or we should all have been involved by authority in vortices. In fact, the vortices have been exploded, and the Newtonian principle of gravitation is now more firmly established, on the basis of reason, than it would be were the government to step in, and to make it an article of necessary faith. Reason and experiment have been indulged, and error has fled before them. It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself. Subject opinion to coercion: whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men; men governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons. And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity. But is uniformity of opinion desirable? No more than of face and stature. Introduce the bed of Procrustes then, and as there is danger that the large men may beat the small, make us all of a size, by lopping the former and stretching the latter. Difference of opinion is advantageous in religion. The several sects perform the office of a Censor morum over each other. Is uniformity attainable? Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth. Let us reflect that it is inhabited by a thousand millions of people. That these profess probably a thousand different systems of religion. That ours is but one of that thousand. That if there be but one right, and ours that one, we should wish to see the 999 wandering sects gathered into the fold of truth. But against such a majority we cannot effect this by force. Reason and persuasion are the only practicable instruments. To make way for these, free enquiry must be indulged; and how can we wish others to indulge it while we refuse it ourselves. But every state, says an inquisitor, has established some religion. No two, say I, have established the same. Is this a proof of the infallibility of establishments? Our sister states of Pennsylvania and New York, however, have long subsisted without any establishment at all. The experiment was new and doubtful when they made it. It has answered beyond conception. They flourish infinitely. Religion is well supported; of various kinds, indeed, but all good enough; all sufficient to preserve peace and order: or if a sect arises, whose tenets would subvert morals, good

sense has fair play, and reasons and laughs it out of doors, without suffering the state to be troubled with it. They do not hang more malefactors than we do. They are not more disturbed with religious dissensions. On the contrary, their harmony is unparalleled, and can be ascribed to nothing but their unbounded tolerance, because there is no other circumstance in which they differ from every nation on earth. They have made the happy discovery, that the way to silence religious disputes, is to take no notice of them. Let us too give this experiment fair play, and get rid, while we may, of those tyrannical laws. It is true, we are as yet secured against them by the spirit of the times. I doubt whether the people of this country would suffer an execution for heresy, or a three years imprisonment for not comprehending the mysteries of the Trinity. But is the spirit of the people an infallible, a permanent reliance? Is it government? Is this the kind of protection we receive in return for the rights we give up? Besides, the spirit of the times may alter, will alter. Our rulers will become corrupt, our people careless. A single zealot may commence persecutor, and better men be his victims. It can never be too often repeated, that the time for fixing every essential right on a legal basis is while our rulers are honest, and ourselves united. From the conclusion of this war we shall be going down hill. It will not then be necessary to resort every moment to the people for support. They will be forgotten, therefore, and their rights disregarded. They will forget themselves, but in the sole faculty of making money, and will never think of uniting to effect a due respect for their rights. The shackles, therefore, which shall not be knocked off at the conclusion of this war, will remain on us long, will be made heavier and heavier, till our rights shall revive or expire in a convulsion.

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 31, 2008 4:09 PM
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pt.2

The present state of our laws on the subject of religion is this. The convention of May 1776, in their declaration of rights, declared it to be a truth, and a natural right, that the exercise of religion should be free; but when they proceeded to form on that declaration the ordinance of government, instead of taking up every principle declared in the bill of rights, and guarding it by legislative sanction, they passed over that which asserted our religious rights, leaving them as they found them. The same convention, however, when they met as a member of the general assembly in October 1776, repealed all acts of parliament which had rendered criminal the maintaining any opinions in matters of religion, the forbearing to repair to church, and the exercising any mode of worship; and suspended the laws giving salaries to the clergy, which suspension was made perpetual in October 1779. Statutory oppressions in religion being thus wiped away, we remain at present under those only imposed by the common law, or by our own acts of assembly. At the common law, heresy was a capital offence, punishable by burning. Its definition was left to the ecclesiastical judges, before whom the conviction was, till the statute of the 1 El. c. 1. circumscribed it, by declaring, that nothing should be deemed heresy, but what had been so determined by authority of the canonical scriptures, or by one of the four first general councils, or by some other council having for the grounds of their declaration the express and plain words of the scriptures. Heresy, thus circumscribed, being an offence at the common law, our act of assembly of October 1777, c. 17. gives cognizance of it to the general court, by declaring, that the jurisdiction of that court shall be general in all matters at the common law. The execution is by the writ *De haeretico comburendo*. By our own act of assembly of 1705, c. 30, if a person brought up in the Christian religion denies the being of a God, or the Trinity, or asserts there are more Gods than one, or denies the Christian religion to be true, or the scriptures to be of divine authority, he is punishable on the first offence by incapacity to hold any office or employment ecclesiastical, civil, or military; on the second by disability to sue, to take any gift or legacy, to be guardian, executor, or administrator, and by three years imprisonment, without bail. A father's right to the custody of his own children being founded in law on his right of guardianship, this being taken away, they may of course be severed from him, and put, by the authority of a court, into more orthodox hands. This is a summary view of that religious slavery, under which a people have been willing to remain, who have lavished their lives and fortunes for the establishment of their civil freedom.

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 31, 2008 4:07 PM
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pt.1

Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, Query 17, 157--61

1784

The first settlers in this country were emigrants from England, of the English church, just at a point of time when it was flushed with complete victory over the religious of all other persuasions. Possessed, as they became, of the powers of making, administering, and executing the laws, they shewed equal intolerance in this country with their Presbyterian brethren, who had emigrated to the northern government. The poor Quakers were flying from persecution in England. They cast their eyes on these new countries as asylums of civil and religious freedom; but they found them free only for the reigning sect. Several acts of the Virginia assembly of 1659, 1662, and 1693, had made it penal in parents to refuse to have their children baptized; had prohibited the unlawful assembling of Quakers; had made it penal for any master of a vessel to bring a Quaker into the state; had ordered those already here, and such as should come thereafter, to be imprisoned till they should abjure the country; provided a milder punishment for their first and second return, but death for their third; had inhibited all persons from suffering their meetings in or near their houses, entertaining them individually, or disposing of books which supported their tenets. If no capital execution took place here, as did in New-England, it was not owing to the moderation of the church, or spirit of the legislature, as may be inferred from the law itself; but to historical circumstances which have not been handed down to us. The Anglicans retained full possession of the country about a century. Other opinions began then to creep in, and the great care of the government to support their own church, having begotten an equal degree of indolence in its clergy, two-thirds of the people had become dissenters at the commencement of the present revolution. The laws indeed were still oppressive on them, but the spirit of the one party had subsided into moderation, and of the other had risen to a degree of determination which commanded respect.

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JANUARY 31, 2008 4:06 PM

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Dr. Elliott,

Many thanks for the thoughtful, deeply insightful comments. I for one wholeheartedly concur, though I also cherish the many other sources of inspired truths besides scripture that undergird the bedrock foundations of our wonderful nation and of a hoped-for-peaceful world. Some of those truths were hard-won by people who didn't have or know of the Bible, and to them I remain just as respectful and grateful as to those who hard-earned the privilege of our having that sacred text at our fingertips. Also, I'm grateful for the humility of Jefferson in realizing that this nation and its constitution are greater than he alone or any one or two of them could have conceived. They needed the collective minds of the many, as we do today.

POSTED BY: PARKER | JANUARY 31, 2008 3:24 PM

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Nonsense. Jefferson was not a Christian, he was a Deist. He did not believe in the god of the Bible, he did not believe in the divinity of Jesus and he did not believe in any kind of omnipresent deity. For a professor, you have an awfully muddy view of our own history.

POSTED BY: DZ | JANUARY 31, 2008 11:19 AM

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