Future Challenge of Faith-based Governance

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Introduction

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References

Introduction

Western civilization emerged into the 20th century following the neutralization of the religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants characteristic of previous centuries. A degree of separation of church and state was assured -- even in countries with state religions. This trend has been dramatically reversed through the uniquely Christian inspiration of the Coalition of the Willing under the leadership of the USA -- in what has been perceived as a "crusade" against the Islamic faith in particular and against dissidence in general.

The unique characteristic of organized religion in a complex world is a freedom from public doubt -- whatever private doubts may be matters of personal conscience. This degree of righteous conviction achieves its most emphatic and unconstrained expression in the
leadership of the Coalition of the Willing. For it is indeed the case that George Bush (USA), Tony Blair (UK) and John Howard (Australia) are men of deep Christian faith, whether or not they are born-again Christians as in the case of Bush and Howard. Secondary members of the Coalition included the traditionally Catholic countries of Italy and Spain.

The world has had to struggle over centuries with the erroneous convictions of the Catholic Church regarding many insights of science - as exemplified by the delay of four centuries with respect to the discoveries of Galileo [more]. These convictions were reinforced by an infallible papacy. This struggle now continues with the increasing conflict between creationism and evolution biology in the USA -- over which George Bush has claimed to be neutral -- and an emphasis on faith-based programmes both by Bush and Blair. A particular focus was provided in 2003 in the debate over the future European Constitution and the implications of including or excluding any mention of God [more | more].

The paper is in two parts. The concern here in Part A is to identify areas in which, through this righteous sense of knowing the truth beyond any reasonable challenge, Christianity is now directly complicating aggravating world disorder -- in addition to the challenges presented by the many other problems of the world, including terrorism (see online Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential). This is not to deny complicity of other faiths (notably Judaism and Islam) but that has been frequently analyzed in relation to the crisis in the Middle East.

The question is whether Christian leadership of the "free world" is now perverting the highest values of Christianity beyond recognition. There is however also a case for recognizing the degree to which science -- in contrasting its perspective with that of religion -- also constitutes a belief system that has some of the characteristics of other faith-based initiatives.

Such questions have some merit in a period in which the emergent American global strategy for the 21st century seeks to impose an American order worldwide -- an order based on American principles, and the privileged American relation to God, that many in other countries may be challenged to understand. Other members of the Coalition of the Willing believe, as articulated by Tony Blair, that it is futile to protest this hegemonic strategy and its benefits for the world. This hegemony is now being extended by the Bush Administration in the form of military control of what it terms "near space," thereby laying claim to the area of the Solar System that lies between the Earth and the Moon's orbit. "A key objective is not only to ensure U.S. ability to exploit space for military purposes, but also as required to deny an adversary's ability to do so," is how the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review (2001) explained the strategy (see Joel Bleifuss. Roofs from God. 2003)

However, if it is to be accepted, any such faith-based approach to global governance calls for a proactive exploration of the flaws apparent in previous faith-based approaches to governance -- on which historical perspective has been slow to emerge. Attention to the lessons of history is vital if world civilization is to avoid the traps of the past. Pointers in this direction are outlined in Part B.

Any reflection on faith-based "religious" approaches to governance, should also consider the nature of the "faith" placed by other sectors of society in their own preferred approaches to governance, including:

- technocrats: in the economic and global models on which they assume it is desirable and appropriate to base decisions about governance.
- military: in the inculcated faith in the leadership and command structure
- legal professions: in the rule of law
- business and commerce: in the belief in the role of the market, especially in relation to "confidence", and in the persuasive power of money
- organizations: in their "value charters" as "credos" focusing the collective commitment of their employees and members
- employees: in the social safety nets to which they may well commit resources throughout their working lives

As remarked by John Ralston Saul:

Reason is a narrow system swollen into an ideology. With time and power it has become a dogma, devoid of direction and disguised as disinterested inquiry. Like most religions, reason presents itself as the solution to the problems it has created. (Voltaire's Bastards: the dictatorship of reason in the West, 1993).

Attention should also be given to the new degree of "faith" which the leadership in faith-based governance now expects the electorate to have in its judgement and capacity -- as with Tony Blair's appeals to "trust me" in a time of democratic deficit and voter apathy. There is considerable danger that "faith-based governance" will come to mean just that -- an unreasonable dependence on the part of those who govern in the electorate's "faith" in them, irrespective of strong indications suggestive of the need for a change of regime. This expectation is a characteristic of many non-democratic societies.

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Part A: Patterns of the Past -- Christian Complicity in World Disorder

Part B: Towards Fruitful Patterns of Faith-based Governance

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