

RELIGION AND POLITICS

FINDING NORMATIVE FACTORS IN CURRENT DISCUSSIONS

by

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The intention in this paper, in keeping with the central theme of this conference, is to identify normative elements in the current discussion concerning the relationship between religion and politics. By normative elements, reference is being made to constant, valid structural factors, which often assume formal status, around which thoughts, sentiments, and attitudes coalesce or are systematically organized. In both religion and politics such normative elements assume both constitutive and regulative functions. That is, they can appear in the form of substance or content (as in religious and/or political convictions and assertions) and/or as factors that shape and direct inquiry and representation about substance and content. To approach the subject this way is to recognize and extend Immanuel Kant's insight: apriori-synthetic factors are also present in "creedal" affirmation (whether of religious or political modalities). Thus, recognition of this fundamental interdependence is necessary to understanding relationships between these two spheres of avowal and activity.

Our focus is on the contemporary era, that is, on one or two matters of controversy that exhibit both religious and political dimensionality. Much of the controversy I will be referencing is drawn from contemporary American social, cultural, political and religious life, which provides a rich but complex setting for the testing of ideas and theses. But I shall also be lifting out a "case study" of post-Marxist character from eastern Europe, and I shall be doing this in order to have at least two points of reference in advancing my thesis. After dealing with conceptual and definitional matters, I shall offer the beginnings of a phenomenological portrayal of the relationships between religion and politics, a sketch that will reinforce the observation that religion and politics are more alike than unlike, and often come bound together in specific cultural settings.

My inquiry is rooted in leads offered in Professor Jacob Neusner's thorough and provocative background paper, the one in which he offers an abbreviated description of how religion speaks through politics, and, therefore, how religious systems function within the social (and, I presume, political) order. A religious system encompasses three main components, Neusner suggests: "a world-view, a way of life, and an account of the character of the social entity that realizes the way of life and explains that way of life through the specified world-view." It is an abbreviated description since it uses fewer words to get at the oft-cited description proposed by Clifford Geertz in his essay, "Religion as Cultural System," in Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion(1966), edited by Michael Banton. According to Geertz, religion is:

- (1) a system of symbols which acts to
- (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men
- by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence
- and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of fac-

tuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

Using these component-based definitional descriptions as starting point, I wish to point the discussion beyond the ways in which religious systems acquire political entailment, and to employ culture, rather than religion or religious system, as prevailing context. Then, within a cultural frame, I'd like to identify the various components that have place or influence there, and explore the relationships between these components. My suggestion is that this cultural situation deserves greater in-depth investigation than it has received to date, because the components that relate to each other are more numerous than is usually acknowledged, and, thus, their interdependencies are also more complex. In fact, to understand the ways in which religion and politics actually intersect, inquiry must consult methodology as supple as Aristotle's causal analyses in order to come to terms with the dynamic and complex interaction involved. But it is impossible to proceed any longer in this theoretical and abstract manner. It is time to turn to an example which we will employ to tease out the rudiments of the crucial relationship on which this inquiry is focused.

Religion and Politics in the Prague Revolution

The example I cite draws upon the so-called "Velvet Revolution" that occurred in Prague, in what is now the Czech Republic, in 1989. In the social and cultural change that the revolution signified, religion came to speak through politics in rather profound ways. But more than religious system was involved. In addition there was ideology, there was critique of ideology, there was deliberate recollection of previous times in which ideology was

challenged in the name of transformed religion, and there was a way in which the new era in Czech life exhibited a representational quality, that is, by providing mythic substance to the new or revised collective identity of the Czech people. Of course, we don't have the time or space here to detail many of the relevant background factors. As it happens, I have the privilege of conducting a graduate seminar at Santa Barbara on this subject, and two of my students, Shawn Landres and John Nemec, each with a special interest in this subject, are engaged in detailed historical and philosophical background investigation. As it also happens, I wrote at some length on this subject in a paper prepared for the World Institute of Phenomenological Research in Guadalajara last summer. The more I probe the more fascination I find with this chapter of contemporary European intellectual history. For the driving questions have been elevated by the late Ernest Gellner, Prague-born Cambridge philosopher, who, at the time of his death, was the director of the Center for the Study of Nationalism at the new Central European University in Prague, and whose most recent book carries the title Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals (1994). My thinking on these matters has also been influenced by Dinko Tomasic and Stjepan G. Mestrovic, each of whom has written extensively on the subject of relationships between ideology and the structure of Eastern European societies. Behind much of such analysis lies the contrast between "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" as proposed by the nineteenth theorist, Friedrich Tonnies. But in this paper I shall follow Gellner's analysis, noting beforehand that the matters he investigated remain unsettled, and are clearly open to additional analysis and interpretation.

Gellner's subject is the relationship between culture and politics, which relationship must always be approached in dynamic rather than static terms.

Focused on developments in eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Gellner is naturally curious about the breakdown of Marxist ideas and society, to which he attaches a more comprehensive theory about the subsequent rise of nationalisms and fundamentalisms. In Gellner's terms, Marxism was done in not because it eliminated the transcendent from religion, but because it "over-sacralized the immanent." As he explains it, "Spinoza had taught that the world was one indivisible unity suffused by the divine, which pervaded it symmetrically. Hegel had added historical movement to this vision, and Marxism was born of this fusion of ideas" (p. 40). Paradoxically, this so-called atheistic orientation to reality had too much sacredness. As Gellner explains:

Pantheism may be a possible state of mind for an unusual, God-intoxicated man such as Spinoza, but it is caviare for the general: the commonality of men require a spiritually stratified world, in which there is not only the sacred but also the profane. Everything may be sacred, but some things must be much more sacred than others.... By sacralizing all aspects of social life, notably work and the economic sphere, Marxism deprived men of a profane bolthole into which to escape during periods of lukewarmness and diminished zeal (p. 40).

In addition, Marxist soteriology was lacking in precision. As Gellner analyzes it, Marxism offers total salvation, but to humankind as a totality, and not to individuals.

It has virtually nothing to say to an individual in personal anguish or in some kind of life crisis, except perhaps, at most, to advise him to rejoice in the eventual beatitude of all humanity, and to encourage him to help in the struggle and gird his loins for it.... Marxism has nothing to say to personal tragedy and bereavement. (p. 39-40).

Take the city of Prague during the Marxist period, and pay careful attention to the way in which the critique of Marxism assumed political, social, cultural, religious (or should we say "collective spiritual") form. For when instruments of criticism were sought, the Czech (or Prague) political theoreticians found them in revisiting and reconstituting their intellectual and religious legacies. Prague, we recall, is the place where John Huss, benefiting from Bohemian exposure to John Wyclif's ideas, employed commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard to call the Czech citizenry back to the teachings of the New Testament and the life of poverty that he believed characteristic of the original followers of Jesus Christ. We can't recount the entire story here. Suffice it to recall that Huss was imprisoned, that he was tried for heresy, that he appealed to his conscience, and that he was condemned and burned, meeting his death with great courage on July 6, 1415. This, in brief, are the headlines. But in more comprehensive and extensive cultural terms, Huss' courage combined with Huss' martyrdom became the signal event in the acquisition or achievement of Czech national identity.

The historical pattern and precedent was revisited during modern and contemporary Czech resistance to social, political, cultural and religious repression under Soviet domination. Remarkably, there was a supreme act of martyrdom, likened in collective memory to that of John Huss, in which the citizens of the Czech Republic found identity as well as solidarity. On January 19, 1969 Jan Palach burned himself to death in front of the statue of St. Vaclav in Wenceslaus Square. Palach's dramatic act was a suicidal protest against the repressions of Soviet occupation. A few months later, Vaclav Havel, then a poet and playwright, appealed to Alexander Dubcek, then President, to democratize the society, promising that such an act of defiance "would place before us an ethical mirror as powerful as that of Jan Palach's recent deed." Dubcek,

under pressure from the communists, took no action. But the revolution that was called for was already in process. Havel said that Palach's self-immolation marked the inauguration of a period in which "human existence itself is at stake."

Other figures entered the scene. The influence of Tomas Masaryck, president of the First Czechoslovak Republic from 1919-1938, was drawn upon. Masaryck recognized that Czech national consciousness had been grounded and shaped by the Hussite movement; thus, through Masaryck's testimony, Huss gained fresh place in contemporary Czech consciousness. The influence of Jan Patočka is strong too. Patočka is the philosopher who taught Vaclav Havel, who then founded the now famous Charter 77, the statement of resistance to Soviet occupation and communist ideology. But prior to Patočka there was a Moravian, Edmund Husserl, the founder of philosophical phenomenology, in which Patočka was steeped, and to whose theory Vaclav Havel turned when attempting to update Hussite principles regarding the indispensable qualities of "inner strength." And when Havel sought the ideas and terminology to counter repressive Marxist thinking, he found them all that he needed in Husserl's conception of lebenswelt, or life world. For Havel, the resort to lebenswelt fosters the conditions of "living in truth." The alternative to top-down theoretical deduction (as in Marxist presumptions) is attention to "the flow of life" that evidences deep contrasts between the artificiality of ideology and the fundamentality of ideas. In 1989, it was this view -- this sense of how life should be lived -- that was brought to prominence by the artists, philosophers, educators, musicians, writers and others who led the successful revolution. Writing about it subsequently, Havel observed:

I think the end of communism is a serious warning to all mankind. It is a signal that the era of arrogant, absolute reason is drawing to a close and that it is high time to draw conclusions from that fact.

Then, pointing to the fundamental contrast in the two ways of life that were competing against each other, Havel added:

Communism was not defeated by military force, but by life, by the human spirit, by conscience, by the resistance of Being and man to manipulation. It was defeated by a revolt of color, authenticity, history in all of its variety, and human individuality against imprisonment within a uniform ideology.

In another place, he describes the same transaction in these terms:

Communism...was an attempt, on the basis of a few propositions masquerading as the only scientific truth, to organize all of life according to a single model, and to subject it to central planning and control regardless of whether or not that was what life wanted.

Does the transposition qualify as religion or as politics? Do shifts in collective consciousness, as in adoption of world-views, register as political occurrences or as changes in belief and attitude? When the questions are posed this way, it is difficult to know how first to classify whatever the subject is that deals with ways of life, world-view, the instrumentation by which they are brought to realization, and the interpretive mechanisms through which they are explained.

The Prague Revolution as Working Paradigm

What do we learn about the relationship between religion and politics by studying the "Velvet Revolution" of Prague in 1989? First, it is impossible to talk about relationships between religion and politics apart

from some precise sitz im leben, that is, a frame-work in which they are situated. And, in my judgment, the comprehensive framework is neither religion nor politics, but culture (which must always combine the social characters of the people with what Erik Erikson called "the conditions and accidents of historical time"). Religion and politics come together -- sometimes in friendly ways and sometimes in hostile ways, sometimes as partners and sometimes as enemies, sometimes in compatibility and sometimes in controversy -- in the composition of culture. Religion and politics are party to the formation, extension, critique, and sometimes dissolution of culture. But there is more. The creation of culture, a perpetually dynamic process, seems to move from instances and periods of integration to instances of periods of decomposition to instances and periods of reconstitution and recomposition. (One can make such an assertion without "buying into" any dialectic of greater specification or precision.) And the specific form or modality that both religion and politics assume depends very significantly upon the stage in that ongoing dynamic process at which they are called upon to do their respective duty. What I am proposing is that both the Neusner abbreviated definition of the ingredients of a religious system and the earlier definition of religion offered by Clifford Geertz must, like Ezekiel's altar, be placed on wheels. That is, they must be equipped to handle the ebb and flow of cultural change, for the functions that are assigned to religion and politics, together with the relationships they have to each other, is heavily determined by the roles they are assigned in the perpetual composition-decomposition-recomposition process through which culture finds expression and collective identity is both known and enunciated. In cultural terms, ideologies are never fixed and set once for all, but are always susceptible to criticism, and eventually succumb to post-ideological identities

based on a return to a shared sense of what is fundamentally and uniquely important. This may involve replacing ideology with lebenswelt, or it may be an invocation of the time of origin (e.g. directly associating Jan Palach's death with the martyrdom of John Huss), or it may be a call to "live in the truth" (employing Vaclav Havel's now famous injunction) as distinct from dependency upon ideological illusions. But at every stage in this ongoing process, the mythic element asserts itself. In the case before us, the prevailing myth begins with Huss, extrapolates the meaning of his death, moves to Palach, extrapolates the meaning of his death in correspondence with the death of Huss, then to Charter 77 (which owns clear parallels to the "creedal" documents that were issued in conjunction with Huss' death), then to the loss of life and spirit that resulted therefrom together with the numerous extended imprisonments (including that of Havel himself), and then, finally, to the glorious suspension of ideological repression through the successes of the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

Everything that Professor Neusner said about religious systems is eminently accurate. And I know that he would have no objection to my insisting that the relationships between all of the necessary components -- world-view, way of life, and social entity that realizes and explains/interprets this way of life -- are always dynamic, are always in process, and thus can never be described or defined in any static way. The same holds for Geertz' definition: the system of symbols, which establishes motives, and is undergirded conceptually and ontologically, is always in process of attestation, criticism, reformation, and reformulation. It is also extremely important to notice that the normative factor, no matter what stage of the composition/decomposition cycle is being considered, is that which most significantly establishes and secures collective identity. The silent revolution occurred in

Prague in 1989, when the rudiments of the fundamental fifteenth-century Czech orientational event were repristinated to create the foundation for a late nineteenth-century, post-Marxist revised collective identity. Moreover, when this identity became secure, its normative factors were enunciabile in political and religious terms that were compatible with each other. When identity is not sure -- as it was not sure in Czechoslovakia during the Marxist period -- such confusion shows up in intense or ever-smoldering conflicts both in and between religion and politics.

At this point we must observe that there is always potential conflict between religion and politics because of jurisdictional matters: their respective spheres of operation contain shared boundaries and overlapping interests. But when collective identity is sure -- may I add, under a strong sense of a common good -- then jurisdictional matters yield more smoothly to agreement or concord in the form of workable, uncontested arrangements. The "case study" offered by the Prague Revolution of 1989 teaches us the ingredients of cultural memory provide the clue as to how religion and politics are to be harmonized. Such harmonization occurs in close correspondence to the re-establishment (which is also the recreation) of the basis of collective identity.

The Current Abortion Controversy in the United States

With this analysis of the Czech Revolution behind us, I'd like now to turn briefly to the current situation in the United States. As everyone knows there is a crisis in this nation concerning the relationship between religion and politics, and, at the same time, nearly everyone agrees that, for perhaps nearly a decade now, we have been experiencing what is most frequently referred to as "cultural war."

The first observation would be that when religion and politics are in severe crisis and the culture itself -- or, more precisely, the cultures themselves -- shows signs of profound conflict, these are signs that the pieces have come apart, and that previous compositions have been dissolved. Such times are not periods of cultural integration. Indeed, they are just the opposite, and we can discuss or debate the extent to which disintegration has occurred. In my own view, the disintegration has become so extensive that we've nearly reached its logical limit. We are experiencing a period of such severe atomisation that we can be sure of no other normative order than that which individuals are able to acquire for themselves and defend successfully against competing interests. We are counseled to "practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty," as if it has already been conceded that virtue is random, as violence has become random, and image and affectation have replaced reason. Order is no longer dependable or predictable, meaning that there is little or no confidence in institutions, including government, and little or no confidence that traditional forms of social order, such as the family, can make it in a world like this. There is little, if any, public trust. We are experiencing diminishing respect for our public schools. We no longer expect much good to come from the workings of political parties. We do not associate political activity with virtues to be emulated. So we experience doom and gloom, anger, despondency, lack of hope. As the philosophies of Lucretius, Democritus, and Epicurus illustrate, atomism is a highly pessimistic orientation to reality. The atomisation of life occurs as response to the fear or suspicion that what controls us is both irresponsible and unresponsive, indifferent to us, indifferent to our fate.

It is time, of course (as soon as someone can determine the route) for recomposition. But the recompositional task is not easy because it involves

bringing all of the necessary elements, ingredients and components back into effective alignment. In my judgment, we are experiencing the instinct in this direction in the cause of the Christian Coalition. But the effort is doomed to failure by virtue of the misguided expectation that we can recapture what we had before. In formal, apriori terms, this judgment is correct. That is, the crisis will cease once the ingredients of cultural composition are made party to a constructive venture. But the wish to have it together -- to have dependable order, and religion and politics in affective alignment -- is not accomplished by an effort to reestablish some previous era, as if we could return to the 1950s, or to the conditions of social and cultural life that pertained prior to the advent of the Counter Culture. In this regard, there is no turning back. There can be no substantive reversal of cultural change. Yes, items previously born can be transported into the present, but previous cultural dynamics cannot be made to substitute for current cultural conditions. If reformulation is to occur, it can only be enunciated within the specific terms of current cultural conditionality. Thus, the crucial intellectual task is to submit selected items from collective memory to the creative processes by which cultures are composed.

Such analysis demonstrates that the abortion controversy is symptomatic of the crisis this civilization faces. I approach this topic with fear and trepidation, for I have not yet been party to a discussion of abortion that has ended amicably. And yet, it behooves us, for background contextual purposes, to recall Matthew Arnold's observation, namely, that in the midst of the industrial revolution and immense colonial expansion, the question that most bothered the citizens of nineteenth-century England was this: "has the Church of England committed apostasy?" Arnold believed this question had been brought to the forefront by the tremendous influence vested in John

Henry Newman. (Comment: we'll never know; it might have been the other way around; it might have been John Henry Newman who gained such attention because of the national preoccupation with the collective religious question.) We are employing Arnold's insight for a very specific reason. It does happen, from time to time, that a certain question or issue dominates public discussion, and in twentieth-century America, this question seems to be about the moral status of the act of abortion. The question is about the morality of abortion because the line is being drawn precisely there, that is, in public discussion, concerning whether we believe ourselves to be a sacred or a secular society.

The consequences are immense. If we have become a secular society, then large segments of the population -- we think specifically of millions of citizens who continue to worship in traditional ways -- cannot feel at home here, for their birthrights, the bases on which they understand themselves to relate to the world, have been sold to alien forces. But if we dare to call ourselves a sacred society, and, specifically, under the terminology that is being employed in the abortion controversy, then large segments of the population recognize or fear that their civil rights and personal freedoms have become subject to the same kinds of dogmatic tyranny that are responsible for the most tragic periods of human history. The abortion controversy, in other words, is carrying extraordinarily heavy moral weight. It has become the focal point of a serious debate (to employ Professor Neusner's definitional words once again) about the character and, thus, the integrity of "our way of life" and the way we, collectively, view the world.

The moral status of abortion is a tremendously complex issue. And it does no good to try to appeal to some perceived national consensus, such as,

"Well, the nation agrees on this subject: the majority of people believe in choice, and the majority of people wish to reduce the number of abortions." Even Senator Bill Bradley's comment, that "abortion should be legal, safe, and rare" is not thoroughly or systematically satisfying. The reason that these responses do not suffice is that the conditions of a sacred orientation to reality cannot be established on a percentage basis. Values that are perceived to be normative values cannot be assigned relative status. And, from the other side, if choice is qualified in any way, it isn't choice. If options are limited, if decisions are constrained, if the ability to choose is made conditional, personal freedom has been abrogated. So the two sides are on a collision course. To return to the terminology we have been employing from the beginning, the controversy is really a matter of contested way of life, and, with this, contested world-view. As has been noted, when there is contested way of life, together with contested world-view, there is also controversy --and, in this instance, competition -- over the criteria by which authorized collective identity is determined and claimed.

Everyone recognizes that there is no simple solution. But there may be some helpful clarification if formal conceptual factors can be identified in this situation similarly to the way they were identified vis-a-vis the Prague situation that was referenced previously. As in "Prague," the clarification will come when there is an advance upon the current formulation, apart from which there can be no overcoming of the present impasse. No, the society will not discover perfect clarity on this question, but perhaps, in time, the society will get beyond it. It is already clear how this will happen, namely, when the test case is disconnected from the question about sacred vs. secular society, that is, when the morality of abortion is not looked to serve this diagnostic function. When one thinks about it, it is not altogether clear why

capital punishment, for example, could not serve the same purpose, for the morality of capital punishment resembles the morality of abortion in that each involves the willful, deliberate taking of human life within the context of unfortunate circumstances. Each is the consequence of a decision about ending life prematurely. But when we move in this direction, we are entering upon a conversation that eventually also references suicide, euthanasia, and even the kinds of premature cessation of human life that occurs on the field of combat. Within this range of potential test-case issues, it is not altogether apparent why abortion was selected as the litmus test that acquired sine qua non characteristics.

When significant that it was not until right now, in the history of the western world, that this issue gained such prominence. And there were no particular historical reasons to prompt such an occurrence. Thus, our analysis tends to show that abortion is symptom rather than problem, and that its occurrence is ideologically or world-view driven. It will fade from prominence when contextual factors change, and we'll all wake up, not with clearer understandings, but recognizing that, somehow or other, the issue is now behind us. In this regard, it is significant that the issue does not preoccupy people who are not committed to the equation, namely, that attitudes toward abortion are reflective of convictions regarding whether our prevailing worldview is sacred or secular. We can go further. This equation is conceptual and not only attitudinal when it is hooked up to natural-law theory (as in much Roman Catholic thinking about the matter) or when "abortion" stands in for "evolution" (as in much conservative or fundamentalist Protestant thinking). But in both instances it is the formal conceptual

scaffolding -- that is, the prescribed way of thinking about these matters -- that is most in question. Thus, when searching for normative factors in religion and politics we must be attentive to prescriptions that become attached to patterns/processes of analyses and reflection.

Phenomenological Portrayals of Religion and Politics

Finally, I'd like to offer a very brief comparative phenomenological portrayal of differences and similarities between religion and politics. My colleague Ninian Smart, who fought with British forces in World War II, has frequently observed that human beings seem more willing to do for their country than die for their religion. Of course, one can find eloquent exceptions to this rule. But the insight does disclose how much religion and politics are like one another, particularly with reference to the exercising of human commitments, convictions, and passions.

Were one doing a phenomenological portrayal of politics, one could develop a schematism that would look very much like the phenomenological portrayal of religion. Ideational components, for example, are prominent in both cases, so too the tendency to develop associations and movements based on adherence, in Smart's words, to such "doctrinal" strands. Firmly-held convictions are prominent in both cases. Both have a tendency to seek ideological sponsorship. Mythos is also prominent in both frameworks too, as devotees find themselves covered by shared stories and narrative accounts. The workings of charisma are implicit too. And we could proceed further. Both religion and politics have a relationship of dependence upon ethical standards, for example. The politician is sometimes assigned roles and functions similar to those displayed by shamans, or personages with perceived or imputed shaman-like powers to change the con-

tent and terms of prevailing order.

Put all of this together, and one encounters a most arresting conclusion, namely, that Clifford Geertz' oft-cited definition of religion ("...a system of symbols that establishes powerful motivations by projecting conceptions of a general order onto the plane of human experience") applies almost as well as definition of politics. This explains how it happens that the two enterprises often overlap, often share common territory, and are sometimes substituted for each other.

Religion and Politics: A Crucial Open Question

One of my esteemed professors at Yale, Robert Brumbaugh, who taught classical Greek philosophy, liked to remind us of Plato's observation, namely, that "fine things run hard." I suggest that Plato's observation is particularly applicable to the subject of this conference, namely, the relationship between religion and politics. In the United States, we have attempted to clarify this relationship by insisting on separation of church and state. This Jeffersonian principle has functioned effectively to prevent us from establishing a national church, and from ascribing to our President the attributes of the divine right of kings. But there are hosts of thorny issues that the formula leaves untouched. Separation is intent on manifesting differences, leaving largely open the related matter of how separated entities can also be significantly alike. For example, in contemporary discussion, the key and crucial relationship is not between church and state, but between "God" and "country." Here "separation" does not function as convincingly. In addition, it may be possible to honor the technicalities of separation of church and state while striving to "Christianize America" or, from the other side, "Americanize Christianity." And clarity regarding whether or not such ventures are valid,

since they certainly are viable, has not attained consensus status. Moreover, much religion happens outside formal church sponsorship, even when "church" is expanded into "synagogue, temple, mosque," or embellished into, say, "religious institutions" (or even into what is referred to as "organized religion"). And none of this begins to touch the status and power of what Robert Bellah (following Rousseau and Alexis de Tocqueville) called "civil religion," as in "American civil religion." Civil religion exhibits the components of both religion and politics. Indeed, civil religion is itself the product of a fusing of religion and politics.

This leads to the next thought, namely, that what we are experiencing in the United States today can be described as a contest between competing "American civil religions." Much political capital is being expended in this arena; so too considerable, sometimes intense, religious fervor. In the heat of the controversy, it is often difficult to distinguish political capital from religious ardor. The two come intertwined.

But we can go further: Is Islam religion or politics? Is Judaism religion or politics? Is Christianity religion or politics? Is Tibetan Buddhism religion or politics? The answer in all such cases is both-and. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Tibetan Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto, and the other major traditions within the world are both religion and politics. Israel was and is a political entity. Islam is and was a political entity. America, as Sydney Mead and others have attested, is "a nation with the soul of a church." The contest now occurring in Bosnia, as Stjepan G. Mestrovic has illustrated in his brilliant study, Habits of the Balkan Heart (1993), is over competing claims to legitimate succession from "communist civil religion," another critical instance in which religion and politics have come together. It should not be surprising, then, that the deities that are revered in

these traditions stand as objects of worship that are also sometimes called upon to assist political goals: the protection of Mecca, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, securing "our" needs and interests over against those of our enemy, et al. And we can go further. The quarrels that these traditions have with each other is as much over matters of politics as it is over matters of belief. Or, it may be more accurate to say that even the quarrels over articles of belief appear largely to be quarrels over matters of politics.

All of this attests that clarification of matters of this kind will not occur in the abstract. Clarification will never come by securing valid definitions or by developing systematic conceptual formulae. Rather, the only clarity that is available comes by concentrating on the ingredients of specific contexts and frameworks, which, in every instance, is a distinctive cultural context. My thesis is that culture is the comprehensive term within which both religion and politics are contained. I would suggest that culture assigns normative qualities and normative status to factors that may have had their origins in political and/or religious sensibility. And these normative factors have their basis and origin in the interplay between established social character and the accidents and circumstances of history. In every instance, an acknowledged mythic tradition is invoked to deal with challenges to collective identity, and resolution of the challenge does not occur until the tradition is revisited, reworked, and reformulated to provide effective and comprehensive accommodation.

Thus, the subject of this extraordinary conference presents large and important challenges to intellectual inquiry. It does so because the challenge to the way we view the world, live our lives, and find the instrumentation to harmonize and legitimize these two essential factors to both religion and politics, is even larger.