

# RELIGION, POLITICS AND LIBERTY

SIMON BIRCH

If there is anything that has marked the decline of Western Civilisation over the past century, then it has been the erosion of religion by political dogma. Man still worships with fervour and regularity, but not to God. Instead he turns his religious zeal to the 'golden calf' - the cult of the State.

## THE APPROPRIATE PERSONAL ACTIONS

The three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam embrace one common and important tenet which the State finds completely repugnant - that we are still *individuals* whose life on earth will be judged by God in terms of the actions which each of us take as *individuals* towards others as well as ourselves. The State detests this life-guidance out of self-protection. If people are taught by the *New Testament*, for instance, that redemption will be ours if the appropriate *personal* actions are taken in the name of Christ, what role does the State play? In fact, to put it bluntly, what have the persuasive values evolved over two thousand years since the life of Christ got to do with the coercive policies and administration of the post-war Welfare State? The relationship between religion and politics is one which is effectively non-existent at one level for the first is concerned with human *qualities* while the second deals with different *methods* of approaching common (in most systems) goals. The best analogy to be drawn is that of the labyrinth where two people stand at the entrance, both wanting to reach the centre. However they differ as to

whether the most effective method of getting there is by commencing via the left passage or the right passage within the maze. In the same way, politicians inspired by different ideologies share the same aims for society; usually based on Bentham's Utilitarian theory, "the greatest happiness for the greatest number".

On the second level religion is unavoidably linked with political practice, for despite what was said above, history has shown in practice that where one interferes with the other then it is always religion that triumphs. Religion is in essence a personal thing and as Christ said, the Church is built on its adherents' virtues, such as tolerance and good-will towards others; not on a few politicians in cassocks masquerading as clergymen (described in the Gospels as the "pharisees"). The only way the two can become compatible is through a human ethos that allows every one of us to decide between the comparative virtues of faith in God or atheism. Religion thrives in an environment where the individual is presented with the realities of life as God devised them; not the illusion presented by the statist that somehow life is a 'cushy number' in which the majority are expected to stagnate as economic vegetables while the bureaucrats rob, dictate and deny opportunities in their name.

## SOCIALISM EQUALS BLASPHEMY

I am a devout Roman Catholic, and one of the things that strikes me about Christ's teaching is that he em-

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

phasised the importance of charity towards others through the one-to-one interactions which he demonstrated by example during his life. *He* cured the sick, healed the lame and fed the hungry while converting others to follow in his wake. Alternatively, he could have asked why some great collective wasn't trying to achieve these things or, when approached by the rich man, set his disciples on the man and forced him to yield his wealth under duress in the name of equality. At no point, though, did Christ reduce the individual to the status of some cog within a great social machine which would then achieve optimum 'happiness' for all. Heaven is the focus for that image of happiness for everyone who enters while Earth is but a temporary obstacle course where we all have our own cross to bear within a limited period of time. By denying the right of individuals the choice of how to bear that cross, the social engineers are simply trying to play God at His own game. The conclusion that I as a Christian draw is that socialism equals blasphemy. Is it any wonder therefore that Marx vehemently detested religion, to the extent that he likened it to a hallucinogenic drug? Religion created the illusion of advancement for the working classes - self-advancement being a wrecker of Marxism which requires *compulsory* conformity.

"The poor you will always have with you ..." (Matthew 26:11). This isn't the statement of a modern day political realist, but of Christ Himself when anointed at Bethany with expensive perfume - which his disciples thought would have been better disposed of by converting it to its financial currency and giving the money to the poor. 'Caring' has been the most misused adjective of the 1980s; a decade in which the Statists have been presented with their *dies irae*. If they cared so much for the underdogs of society, as they term them, it certainly hasn't shown in their actions. Instead of giving them their undivided, individual attention in the same way as, say, Mother Teresa, they instead, like Aesop's dog in the manger, want to make others pay for their own duties, which in turn arise out of their personal concerns. What is so caring about *stealing* money from a section of the population and *paying* others with it to do so-called *charitable* work for a few people who may not even be deserving of such assistance? What is even more reprehensible is that it is *one* person's whim which dictates the manipulation of *many*. Where are the *values* in that action? Religion teaches us that no matter how irritated we may be that others may not be as moral or caring as us, we must respect our differences, or we are no better than they are; if, that is, they were morally any worse than us in the first place.

## DENATIONALISE THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The only deity that many in power are inspired by nowadays is their guilty conscience. The guilt stems from the fact that they are better off than others

around them. This conscience, though, is not so deep that they do something about it. The effort exerted is mere verbal flatulence from the minister concerned, the money for the chosen underdogs coming from the rest of us.

The established church in this country is currently no better, criticising the Government as "wicked" (the word used by the Bishop of Durham in 1988) while hiding behind the trappings of riches bestowed on it by the State without the population's consent. Denationalise the Church of England and it will start to focus on instilling the values of the next world on a growing flock rather than the politics of the present parliamentary opposition on a decreasing number of followers. Christ's original disciples lived in poverty to demonstrate, through an external sign, their internal faith. It would be appropriate to demand that the state allowance be confiscated from the present clergy in the Church of England so that they might do the same. They should ask for their living from their congregations in the same way that the other Christian denominations do in the 'religious market' with greater commitment and success.

Religion is crumbling in the West, not because of capitalism but because the Church has become complacent and corrupt. The General Synod, for example, behaves as if it were a political decision-making body enshrined within our unwritten Constitution. Bishops used to be awarded their posts on the basis that they had graduated with first class honours from a local parish thriving and inspired because of their leadership. Now a growing handful of bishops graduate from nothing more than an academic institution which teaches them to undermine the very thing from which they are supposed to be drawing guidance and consequently leap-frog to the top position of an unsuspecting diocese.

## CARING FROM THE HEART

I yearn for the stable society espoused by St. Thomas Aquinas who recognised the family as the integral unit within any community. But this can only be achieved within a libertarian framework that allows a religion to thrive without the shackles and dogma of the State. The State has undermined the family by cursing it for its resourcefulness as a strong and coherent entity. True Christians understand that it is through their deeds that they are recognised. The State discourages independence and thus the deeds which arise from it. If a 'caring' society is what individuals want, then it is up to each one of us to decide whether or not we want to expend effort to achieve that goal. We must practise true caring from the *heart* rather than leave it to a minority at the top of the political system to deny us that choice and encourage apathy which in turn promotes atheism. God may have created man and man, in turn, the State - but that doesn't mean that God sanctioned the State as one of His divine creations.