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The Divinity of Politics and Statecraft

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Abstract

The entwinement of morality, religion, and politics is acknowledged widely to be congenital to the very concept of governance. This paper is a critical analysis of the "divine" in the present political arena and a reappraisal of the age-old question of the necessity of religion in politics or lack thereof. A comprehensive understanding of the application of the divine right theory in the modern era is attempted so as to confer the implications of the same. Although the doctrine virtually disappeared from politics after the Glorious Revolution (1688–89), the modern-day leader still reaps the fruits of this ideology. The defence of the theory justifies the divinity as the cradle of every modern theory of the state. The critique, however, questions the very position of such an "outdated" ideology in the cirque of modern times. The paper peruses the pre-existing conflicting ideologies and also attempts to place the concept of divinity within the expanse of the political.

Keywords: *Religion, Government, Divine Right Theory, Modernization, Secularization*

1.0 Introduction

Should religion be discussed in the sphere of politics? Is religion even remotely relevant in the modern society? Is it important to discuss the implications religion can have on policies of a state? Does the statecraft require the guidance of "the divine" anymore? The scholars are often torn when it comes to questions like these, while some argue that the irrationality of religion promotes irrationality in public policy (Krauss 2010) others believe that politics separated from religion is an open-ended conflict over interests and values among people who understand that they have to coexist with one another (Walzer 1998). 'The Information Era', 'The Computer Age', 'The Post Modern Society', whatever the label may be, the present times have sentenced deities, religion, and religious ideologies to be nothing more than tales of the olden days to help the restless toddler put his head on the pillow. The numbers, however, tell a different story: the World Values Survey revealed that more than three-quarters of the respondents in 43 countries continue to profess a belief in some supernatural deity, 63% consider themselves religious, and 70% claim to belong to a religious denomination (Inglehart, Basanez, & Moreno, 1998). The incompatibility of science and religion as stimulated by scientists like Richard Dawkins pointed towards the undeniable decline of religious influence in the public sphere, the world was expected to move towards complete secularization where the burden of creeds and beliefs was not to be borne. But even Dawkins suggests that ending religion might be a bad idea (Sanderson, 2019).

The main argument of modernization theory is that “modern” societies can be differentiated from societies that are still traditional or undergoing development. This shift from traditional to modern has serious consequences for religion. Secularization thus refers to the fact that religion comes to have a less important position in the modern society. (Wuthnow 1991)

However, the fallacious claims of the secularization theory that modernization would somehow magically cleanse the society from the need of a divine or of “superstitious practices” is both deceptive and dangerous. The secularization theory has faced much scrutiny over the years, various researchers saw the recharged political energy of religion as a reaction against the secularization/modernization measure, while others contended the secularization theory was never reliable to begin with considering its incompetence with empirical data (Gill, 2001).

2.0 The Divine Leader

Be it The Divine Right Theory of the west or The Tianming of China (Ulrich Theobald, 2019), all such theories point to the extraction of sovereign authority of the monarch from the heavens since the beginning of kingship itself. The King was placed by God and hence any fingers pointed at The King implied questioning the omnipotent himself. Nevertheless, this legitimization or mandate from heaven remains unchanged in the present political scenario. The doctrine of divine right can be dangerous for both the church and the state (Locke, 1689), therefore there has been an ever-growing attempt at separating the two and destroying all ideologies such as the divine right theory which establish any legitimate linkage between the state and government. Although the theory finds itself to be outlandish and inapplicable to the present era, the ideology still proves itself to be prevalent in the most secular of democracies of the international arena. President Bush claims God told him to invade Iraq (Cornwell, 2011), Donald Trump the 45th president of the U.S. declares himself to be “the chosen one” (Jenkins, 2020), Narendra Modi is compared to be an avatar of Vishnu (Merchant, 2018), ISRO officials pray at the famed Lord Venkateswara Temple in Tirumala prior to every rocket mission, “God made me President” claims Brazil’s Bolsonaro (Ray, 2019) - “it almost seems that the further the statecraft tries flings itself away from the orbits of religion, the closer it’s leaders revolute back.”

3.0 Dilemma of the Politico-Religious Segregation

Terming religion as a "code of conduct" which guides people, Mr JP Nadda the president of the ruling party of India, the most populous democracy, claimed that politics is meaningless without religion (*'Religion is Code..'*, 2020), as it is a religion which tells one what is right and what is wrong, religion in a sense then, defines morality. However, today, more than ever before, morality is impressionistic and subjective. The policies of a nation are based more or less on what will keep the major belief system happy. While Abortion remains a severe issue of contention (before and during elections mostly) in the Judeo Christian world view of the American Society (*Bolce, 1988*), it is legally performed on request in communist China. There is a visible impact of religion on public policies, the most secular of nations have religion-based parties holding major seats and positions. Till there is consensus amongst nation-states regarding the "absolute truth" and true morality, the pluralistic riddle will remain unanswered. "The modern malady in the political arena is one of a fundamental contradiction - there is an unblushing moralizing on politics and a shameless politicizing of morality" (*Zacharias, 2001*)

The proponents of the importance of religious moral compass in governance. However, argue that without God there is no politics, for how is law justified without an immutable lawgiver. Without religion, politics loses its moral structure and purpose, and turns into an affair of group interest and personal ambition (*Tinder, 1989*). Religion and politics should not, or rather cannot be separated for they are both analytically and empirically related (*Levine, 1979*). German Jurist Carl Schmitt argues that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" contending for the innately transcendent nature of statecraft. (*Schmitt, 2006*), therefore a separation between the two seems almost unnatural.

The forced dichotomy between religion and politics of the postmodern era smells of fraudulence considering the impenetrable bond between religion and human behaviour (*Fox J, 2018*). Peter Berger's definition of religion perfectly encompasses this bond: "Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. Put differently, religion is customization in the sacred mode. By sacred what is meant here is a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience. The sacred cosmos is confronted by man as an immensely

powerful reality other than himself. Yet this reality addresses itself to him and locates his life in an ultimately meaningful order.” (*Berger, 1967*). The alliance of religion and emotion is hence preeminent in politics because the connection between religion and emotion is a long and intimate one. Religion has always been a source of profound emotional experience (*Emmons and Paloutzian, 2003*). The effect of religion on the emotion is utilized in politics in various ways such as the fundamentals of parties, revolution and creation of new states, voting and elections, segmentation, war, politicization, elections, national issue, charismatic authority and other such instances where human instincts and emotions play a role in decision making (*Mofidi 2013*). Therefore separating religion from politics will deprive the former from the security and power of a political identity and latter from the essence of humanity and emotions.

4.0 Conclusion

Should then politics be completely free of religion or should it inculcate in it what is beneficial? Religion can be quite useful because it possesses the quality of convincingly articulating moral sensitivities but on the alternative, religious beliefs because of their possibility of causing friction and falling out, must be ‘rationalized’ and banned from having the path to influence the *res publica*. (*Cerella, 2012*). If the “Divine” was only necessary till the enlightenment, when science wasn’t crowned to be the *new god* (*Hamilton, 2012*), if religion is only but an obstacle in the path of true human progress, if violence in our world was attributed to too much religion and if religion is just mainstream and destructive (*Simonetta, 2006*), then why is it that this Godless but scientifically enlightened century has seen more political genocides and mass murders than all the other centuries combined since the dawn of civilization (*Levene, 2000*) and why it’s labelled the bloodiest century in the history of mankind. (*Hobsbawm, 2002*).

The answer perhaps lies in the restructuration of the integration of religious identity with the political. Wuthnow argues that to say that religion undergoes restructuring is to recognize the changing social and political roles that religious communities are playing throughout the contemporary world. The rediscovery of the relationship between the divinity and politics is to understand that religion and politics are always subject to the ways in which people define them and how religious leaders and their secular counterparts negotiate the cultural definitions of their respective institutions (*Wuthnow, 1991*). There has to be a re-emphasis and reconsideration of the role of religion in political systems (*Johnson and Sampson 1994*)

and religious and cultural pluralism needs to be gravely re-examined in scholarly debates. The ability of humans to adjust and adapt themselves religiously and politically, forms the beginning of an integrative analysis of religion and politics (Thomas, 2000). Not only can religion and politics co-exist, they can also undoubtedly uplift each other. Firth highlights how both religion and politics emphasize on integration – politics in its concern for order in society and religion in its concern for congregational bonds (Firth 1981). It is convenient for political scientists to fault religion and find it obsolete for its lack of empiricism and methodological sophistication, but like Martin Marty contends “Religion is not an issue in itself. Rather, it hitchhikes on issues, it barnacles to issues. It subverts issues. It is a penumbra around issues.” (Marty 2000).

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