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Rel 1300

November 29, 2015

The role the Christian church plays in the political realm of the community it is in varies from region to region. This difference can be seen by the different level of taxes the church pays in various states, and the willingness of pro-Christian political candidates to show their bias toward the church, and how society reacts to them. In many cases the popularity of Christianity in the country judges exactly how much popularity Christian political candidates have, and how lenient tax codes are towards churches, though this is not always the case. Different sects of Christianity may also face different political scenarios than other sects in the same countries. Differences, or lack there of, between how the government views Christianity, seen through tax codes, and how the public views Christianity, measured by reactions to Christian candidates, also provides insight into the inner workings of Christian politics in countries.

Many countries around the world provide tax exemptions to religious organizations so that they may collect donations with which to run their organization and provide services to their communities. It is through the small differences in these exemption codes that a country's position on Christianity can be identified. In countries where Christianity is the dominant religion, and the government is more open to freedom of religion, these codes are very relaxed.

For instance, the United States religious exemption codes, which are very similar to those in England (1) which they were derived from, insist that a religious organization provides a service to the community simply by existing, citing positive mental and spiritual health as beneficiaries. Due to this service, Christian churches therefore provide a service that the government does not have to, and as long as the churches do not lead to the private profits of an individual or group, or attempt to lobby for or against political candidates, the churches will remain exempt from taxes (2).

Elsewhere in the world, several factors including the popularity of Christianity, and the freedom of religion due to various forms of politics, lead to tax codes that are not as friendly to the churches. For instance in South Africa, the creation of a new Democratic government led to the rejection of religious organizations exemption status stating that “The revenue loss to the state is justified only in terms of public benefit...the state has a responsibility to ensure these funds are used in a way that serves the public interest.” (3). This form of strictness in tax code is widespread throughout the world, and is deemed a level above the United States and England, because of the verbiage used. As seen here in the South African tax code, religious institutions are not exempt from taxes simply because they are religious institutions as in the U.S and U.K. In South Africa churches must make positive on the government investing in them with exemption, relieving services that the government must usually take on. In a legal sense this is huge because the tax code leaves room for much regulation, inquiry and power to deny a churches' exemption status by the government. For instance in Brazil, government tax code states that only religious institutions who specifically provide educational and social assistance programs can apply for tax exemption status (4). This seems to benefit catholic churches who

tend to include educational schooling in their duties more often than protestant churches.

Perhaps the strictest governments in the world when it comes to tax exemption are communist regimes, as they are both secular, rejecting religion, and usually somewhat stricter on all facets of social freedoms and state spending. This is clearly evident in China. Tax exemption status in China for not for profit organizations, such as Christian churches does exist, though the regulations for churches clearly state that not all of the churches' transactions are free from taxation. Aside from this fact, when Chinese not for profit organizations were interviewed they stated "the reality is quite different from what is stated in these regulations. Interviews with Chinese NPOs reveal that they need to apply separately for income tax exemptions from the relevant tax offices, many of which are unfamiliar with NPOs and the tax regulations governing them. As a result, income tax exemptions for Chinese NPOs appear to be more the exception than the rule" (5). All in all Christian churches have little influence in China, and this is therefore reflected on how they are treated in the government. When it comes to strong centralized governments, any group outside the small leading factions are viewed as political opponents, and are given as little power as possible.

Given the evidence seen in these last paragraphs, one truth can be seen in this data. While Christianity is one of the most widespread and popular religions in the world, its role in the political realm has less to do with Christianity's popularity in the country and more to do with the government's stance on secularism. One can argue that the government is a reflection of the people that it oversees, and this can be seen in this data by the varying levels of strictness instilled on exemption codes for Christian churches. Countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, both countries in which Christianity is the dominant religion and personal

freedoms for citizens is among the highest of any country, Christian churches receive the most leniency. Therefore, one can interpret that the Churches have the most influence on the political realm in these countries than anywhere else. On the other end in China, where Christianity and religion in general is not desired or popular, and personal freedom for citizens is not a priority, Christian churches face little to no leniency at all. Here the Christian church plays no role in the political realm whatsoever. The countries in between these two spectrums therefore fall into levels of strictness based on the two key elements, popularity of Christianity within the population base, and government prioritization of personal freedoms. These two categories can be wrapped up into another central issue and identifying factor of the Christian church's role in political spheres; society's response to openly Christian, or Christian backed political candidates.

There are only three types of responses to Christian political candidates that exist internationally; positive by Christian followers, a negative reaction by followers of various religions and a negative reaction by those who wish to keep church and state separate. These three responses are verified by tax codes, the two separate but distinct negative reactions lead to the varying levels of tax exemption, instead of only exemption or no exemption. The United States and United Kingdom react well to Christian leaders. While they may not be backed by the church in any form, they lean on Christian values and therefore populations for support. In England there exists a Christian Party, who posted on their official website "Christians realise that they are poorly represented in Westminster and elsewhere. Meanwhile our website is making available to Christians all over the country the information they need to help them to vote for a candidate in each constituency who will uphold Christian British Values." (6) While this party blurs the lines between church and state, it does not cross the line. The party is a positive

response to Christian candidates; a group that wishes to fund and elect Christian candidates based on their beliefs specifically Christian social beliefs.

Meanwhile, in a former British colony half way around the world, Christian political candidates are receiving the exact opposite response. In India, Christian candidates are viewed as “an enemy of the people” (7). This is mainly due to a sense of “Hindu nationalism” (7) that exists in India. Christianity is no where near the dominant religion, and Christian candidates are viewed as outsiders who believe in the same God as the British, the people who basically enslaved the Indians and fought with them for centuries. Hinduism in India is a source of national pride, so for political candidates to make openly admit their belief in Christianity would be political suicide.

Similarly, supporters of separation of church and state may just as fiercely reject Christian candidates. This is becoming more and more prevalent in the United States, a country that has always been considered secular though “it was often hard to separate the themes of Christianity and patriotism. After all...the United States had always drawn its main social and political strength from dissenting Protestantism.” (8). The American public is becoming more and more hostile to the idea of Christian candidates being elected president, especially if they belong to a less popular sect of Christianity such as Catholicism. Christian ties especially on the democratic side are now viewed as a negative factor and weakness by the majority of public, who, since the 1988 presidential elections, have favored more secular candidates. (8)

Christianity is active in politics around the world, and its role in each political community is as unique as the country itself. Tax exemption status for Christian churches varies on levels of strictness due to two main factors, political regime and popularity of the religion in each country.

Similarly, public reactions to Christian candidates vary based on the popularity of Christianity in the country and the feverishness with which the people defend a position of secularism.

Word Count: 1560

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