

Ryan Bianco

Mr. Crow and Mr. Steen

Introduction to World Religions

4 December 2015

The Separation of Nothing

The separation of church is integral to create a non-biased democracy. Countries like Saudi Arabia that have their religion tied so closely to their government which can create a double standard for people that do not follow the Sunni sect of Islam. In the United States of America, children are brought up with many fundamental beliefs about it. Children learn about private property, the pursuit and happiness, and possibly the biggest cornerstone to the U.S.A the separation of Church and state. While the federal government cannot endorse one religion over another as the country's official religion, the people that participate in government at a high level are mostly religious. The officials that are elected are, in theory, a fair representation of the people that voted them into office. With that being the case, while religion cannot be federally sponsored and laws cannot be made just on religious preferences, religion plays an integral role in the government today. This paper will argue that in the United States of America today there is no separation between church and state because of how closely tied religion is to the people that vote in our political process.

From the birth of the U.S.A to the place it is today the citizens have changed drastically. This is due to many factors and the history that the U.S has been through. Yet, even as the citizens have changed ideologically on many issues, such as slavery, poverty, and woman's rights, religion is still overwhelmingly popular with the majority of Americans. In 1948 over 91% of Americans said they were affiliated with Christianity compared to 2% who had no

religious affiliation (“Religion” 2). This incredible majority of people who were followers of Christianity also reflected governmental policies at the time. Abortion was still widely illegal which was, and still is, a violation of the Christian teaching saying that a life is created at the moment of conception. Homosexuality was not seen in the government publicly on any level since homosexuality was still considered sinful, another direct teaching from the Bible and the way it was interpreted at the time. However, as the times have moved forward many Christians have moved on from their Christian roots. In 2014, 80% of Americans affiliate themselves with a sect of Christianity while 16% have no religious affiliation whatsoever (“Religion” 1). This is a drastic shift from how it was in 1948 when 2 out of every 100 Americans were not associated with a religion whatsoever. Still, Congressional religious beliefs seem to be minimally changed due to these numbers.

Little seems to be changing in the religions of elective officials. Over 90% of the elected Congress is Christian, 57% Protestant and 31% Catholic with 4% other denominations, while .2% of Congress is not affiliated with a religion (Kaplan 2). This is overwhelmingly disproportionate to how modern Americans identify today and is almost a replica of America’s views on religion in 1948. With numbers like these there has to be a causation into why Congress is not more reflective of the average American’s religious beliefs. At local and state levels there is still bigotry as to who can and cannot hold office. In seven states, such as Maryland and Texas, atheists cannot become city councilmen/women and cannot serve on juries (Crellin 1). So at local levels in 14% of America’s states an atheist is not allowed to hold a local office. Voting starts at the local level and as more people feel disenfranchised, such as atheists of the seven states in the article above, they will feel less inclined to vote since they cannot adequately vote for someone who actually represents all of their beliefs even in their home town.

Religious affiliation in accordance to political party is another matter that must be looked into. About 70% of white Evangelical Protestants are Republican, 80% of Mormons, 51% of white Mainline Protestants, and 49% of Catholics are also Republican (“By Religious Affiliation” 1). With these statistics, it can be deduced that a super majority of Republican voters are of Christian leanings and are willing to elect officials that represent those leanings. Since a simple majority wins elections, Republicans are much more likely to elect a Christian into office than any other religion. This can be attributed as to why so many Republicans are Christian and fight for an end to abortion as well as striving for the U.S.A to be a more “moral” nation.

The Republicans make up 300 of the 535 Congressional seats in office at this time. If nearly all of them are Christian, and they are, then what about the Democrats? Democrats are more willing to vote for someone of a different religious identity, but only slightly. Democrats, known as the liberal party in Congress, still have bias tendencies about those who are not Christian. Democrats view a belief in God as important to a candidate, with 53% of voters saying that they would not vote for a candidate that was an atheist (Ashtari 1). So if half of the Democrats refuse to elect someone that is an atheist, then atheists are almost impossible to get elected. With atheists having the monumental tasks of even being elected, they have little power within the federal government. While 16% of Americans say they are atheists, their influence has yet to have changed the minds of half of voting Americans. In the both liberal and conservative parties.

Without a discussion on the issue of misrepresentation of politicians in office and their religious views based on the average Americans’ religious views then the problem will continue. During the 2012 election Mitt Romney tried to bring up religion and how it should take a role in government, however, Martin J. Medhurst argued that, “Many listeners seemed to take offense at

the very idea of religion being a proper subject for discussion during a political campaign” (7). This claim was supported by evidence of American voters and how they were polled asking if this should be a topic for conversation. While the conversation Romney was trying to start was about the lack of a moral foundation in America, the further discussion about the role minority religions play in politics never occurred on a grander political scale because the initial discussion never occurred. This discussion could have helped more people of other religious denominations and the non-religious, who are now disproportionately represented, be motivated to become more active in the political process and fight for a more equal representation on the federal level of government.

America, in it of itself, has created a public religion to represent it. Political scientist Raymond F. Bulman argues that, “It represents a broad, public belief in God as Creator of nature and nature's laws — the very basis of natural, inalienable rights” (12). This quotation can help explain why even those who do not believe in God may vote for someone that does. Americans are raised with this concept subconsciously. Without even thinking, the majority of Americans are raised in religious areas and are influenced by those religions early on. Those religious influences carry with a child through adulthood and can make an impact on what a person thinks as an adult no matter their religious views today.

With all of these statistics and analysis that have been listed above it is easy to piece together how the separation between church and state exists only in name. With over 90% of elected officials being Christian they push laws that please themselves and please the people that voted them into office. While some politicians are more brazen to go against what their voters want, the majority of Congressmen and women want to get re-elected so doing what their voters say will do so. If the majority of voters are Christian and want Christian values, then their

elective representatives will further this goal. Meaning, politicians will be unable to go against the religious beliefs that their voters believe in which shows how religion still plays an impactful part of the government today because politicians are almost forced to be religious. As Congress passes the bills and pieces of legislation that impact Americans on a national level those bills will almost always have a certain religious bias attached to every piece because if the politicians do not promote what their voters believe in, which is mostly Christianity, then they will not be able to get re-elected.

The greatness of America. All citizens are told how lucky they are to be born in the greatest country on the planet Earth. Even with how great and powerful it is it, like everything else, it has its own faults. Voter turnout is abysmal, gun violence has become rampant, and religious rhetoric still makes its way into the political mainstream even though church and state are supposedly separated. The voters of the minority religions and non-affiliated groups, especially atheism, are not represented well enough and are even politically persecuted and damned in certain states. As a nation, the United States of America has to do a better job of representing its people in a fair and unbiased way and with that create a fair and unbiased government. The likelihood of such a thing happening is near impossible, but everyone must fight for their representatives to stay true to the founding beliefs of this nation and keep their religion out of the peoples' politics.

Works Cited

- Ashtari, Shadee. "Americans Would Rather Vote For A Philandering, Pot-Smoking President Than An Atheist One." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.
- Bulman, Raymond F. "'Myth of Origin,' Civil Religion and Presidential Politics." *Journal of Church and State* 33.3 (1991): 525-39. *JSTOR*. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.
- "By Religious Affiliation." *Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project RSS*. N.p., 01 Feb. 2012. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.
- Crellin, Olivia. "Atheists Are Banned From Holding Public Office In Seven US States | VICE News." *VICE News RSS*. Vice, 10 Dec. 2014. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.
- Kaplan, Rebecca. "Congress Is Still Overwhelmingly Christian." *CBSNews*. CBS Interactive, n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.
- Medhurst, Martin J. "Mitt Romney, 'Faith in America,' and the Dance of Religion and Politics in American Culture." *JSTOR*. Rhetoric and Public Affairs, 2009. Web. 1 Dec. 2015.
- "Religion." *Gallup.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Dec. 2015.