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### Analyzing Worldwide Divisions Between Religion and State

Whether it be locally, nationally or internationally, different religious beliefs and ideals are prevalent within every group of people. The human race contains various, undeniable differences as well as parallels, but that is what makes each country and their religious practices so diverse. These contrasting cultural norms and their respective governments have an immense affect on how societies view and practice religions. I intend to argue and identify the differences in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam and how the relationship of religion and state differs specifically in the spectrums of the United States of America and the Middle East.

The boundary dividing the separation between religion and state is not very distinct in today's societies and as a result governments worldwide struggle to find this middle ground. The impact of the overlap of religion and state is dependent upon the type of authority in charge and consequently no two countries will have the same exact distinction. The democracy of the United States of America gives it's people the freedom and opportunity to draw the barrier line themselves. As a result of this, the clear separation between religion and state is praised and emphasized. On the other hand, the citizens of Middle Eastern countries are not as fortuitous due to their tyrannical governments. They lack the opportunity to draw that line and have a say for themselves. These contrasting views of religious practices and one's right to choose are a direct

reflection of local political decisions and vice versa. Freedom stems from democracy whereas subordination stems from autocratic leadership (Fox, Shmuel 317).

According to Jeffrey Haynes in his article *Religion and Foreign Policy Making in the USA, India and Iran: towards a research agenda*:

For example, various kinds of religious missions notably, Christians and Muslims-have for centuries been a key expression of international religious soft power. Their aim is to seek to change people's religious norms, values and beliefs from one set of views to another set; the result is that individuals and groups in a foreign country eventually behave religiously like the original proselytisers” (Haynes 143).

This statement goes to show how conflicts arising from human differences regarding religion influence and alter the international outlook as well. According to Katzenstein, a starting point is to think of the importance of norms and identity in international relations (Haynes 144). No religion is going to be treated or revered the same in any one country due to varying types of government, political views and the extent or lack of freedom.

There are both benefits and conflicts to governments having a say in religious movements in their society. “ For example, could a state establish a voucher program that funded all public and private schools other than religious ones?1 Or would it be permissible for a board of education to display only secular holiday symbols in schools?” (Tebbe 1264). Cultural and religious influences have the potential to unite people towards common achievements or can isolate society for mistreatment and adversity. In the United States, human diversity regarding religion is portrayed as an exceptional benefit primarily because the United States is a melting pot of all

ternating viewpoints and all traditions have an equal chance to thrive; however, these varying perspectives can also cause conflict since human differences will never end in a win-win.

Christianity is one of the most dominant and powerful religions in the world. Christians established themselves upon the Holy Bible's teachings, Christ's resurrection, and the belief that having faith in those teachings is the only necessity for salvation. They practice this faith by prayer, studying the scriptures, and worship services (Fletcher 153). Christianity is the most prominent religion in the United States and is the infrastructure of what this country was founded on. An advantage of being a Christian in the U.S. would be in the situation, for instance, if a parent wants their child to learn in a religious environment then they have the option of paying for private Christian schools; and if they do not then they can choose public school. On the other hand, there is only conflict for Christians in the Middle East. Christians find themselves oppressed, attacked and persecuted as a result of centuries of religious debate with the Muslims.

Judaism is one of the original religions left in the world. Jews established themselves on the teachings of the Hebrew Bible and the idea of monotheism, similar to Christianity. The Jews practice their religious commandments through prayer, worship, and strict dietary laws (Murray 91). Judaism is highly accepted in both the United States and Israel, however, the rest of the Middle East is not as welcoming. Judaism thrives in the United States because of the close similarity to Christianity, which is the primary religion. The Jews face a well-known conflict of interest from the rest of the Middle East. Political and military disputes over territory has been a constant, perpetual turmoil.

Buddhism is seen as the leading religion in the Eastern Hemisphere. Buddhists root themselves on the teachings of Siddharta Gautama or the "Buddha" and the mission to end suffering

and reach nirvana or enlightenment. They practice this by ritual and devotional practices, and primarily meditation (Amore 379). Buddhism is not very prominent in the United States and could be considered to be a minority religion. Buddhist are a nonviolent, compassionate group who avoid conflict with other religions. Despite human differences, the Buddhist get along with other religions which is beneficial both nationally and internationally.

Hinduism is the world's third largest religion, which is generally practiced in India. However, Hinduism is also exercised around the world throughout numerous traditions. Hindus do not base their beliefs off of collective ideas, but rather a diversity of concepts acknowledging a supreme being-the Brahman, the Vedas texts, reincarnation and karma. These traditions are practiced through meditation, yoga, and healing medicines (Narayanan 281). Hinduism is an interesting religion due to the fact that it is made up of numerous smaller traditions and has no set traditions. This aspect benefits Hindus both in the United States and Middle East since they share several practices with various other traditions around the world.

Islam is the world's second leading religion behind Christianity. Muslim's monotheistic backbone stems from Muhammad's visions and prophecies. This group practices their ritual through the Five Pillars: prayer, faith, almsgiving, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca (Hussain 219). Due to the various contrasting aspects of Islam and Christianity as well as common misconceptions about Muslims and racial profiling, the United States has developed a noticeable conflict with those of the Islamic religion. Racial profiling stems from misinterpretation and lack of understanding of the culture and beliefs of Islam. Sadly, the same conflict arises regarding Christianity in the Middle East, leading one to conclude that racial profiling is the primary cause of human dissimilarity.

All things considered, different groups of people are going to have their own cultural norms which will affect how their society will view religion. I argued and identified the differences in Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam and how the relationship of religion and state differs specifically in the spectrums of the United States of America and the Middle East. The middle ground between religion and state is hard to come by and will reflect the type of government that is in place, democracy or tyranny. No religion is going to be treated or revered the same in any one country due to varying types of government, political views and the extent or lack of freedom. Additionally, cultural and religious influences have the potential to unite people towards common achievements or to isolate society for mistreatment and adversity. Christianity, Judaism and Islam are the most similar religions in that they all believe in monotheism and they practice through worship and prayer. Similarly, Buddhism and Hinduism are comparable in that they are both peaceful, widespread traditions placed all around the world. The leading religious conflicts is that between the Muslims and Christians and Muslims and Jews. These conflicts are both results of centuries of dispute and turmoil over territory and differing religious/political viewpoints. This is interesting since these three religions's foundations resemble each other so closely. Another main reason for these tensions is racial profiling. Racial profiling is a result of people being uneducated and ignorant of other religious practices besides their own and falling into stereotypes. The human race is so diverse that not everyone will always have the same mindsets or goals; however, this is where religious tolerance and coexistence come into play. The fact that groups of people and their religious beliefs differ is what makes these different cultures worldwide so unique. Despite contradictory cultures, governments and beliefs it is amazing to see how so many religions are existing side by side and even though they

might not agree on many aspects they still respect each other and their beliefs locally, nationally, and internationally.

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